TWICE BORN GODS: THE REINVENTED LIBERTINE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

by

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ABSTRACT

The claim has been made that the nineteenth century's interest in libertine fiction is merely "archival." This dissertation seeks to contest that claim by examining the reuse of certain well-known, if not notorious, characters from European seduction narratives of the fifteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries—Valmont, Don Juan, and Tannhäuser—in the work of George Gordon, Lord Byron, Charles Baudelaire, Algernon Swinburne, and Aubrey Beardsley. It finds that these seducers are not static characters deployed for the purpose of allusion or critique, but heroes, reworked and rehabilitated as the central figures of literary seductions intended to entice and control the reader and address the perceived inequities of nineteenth-century morality or politics. By applying a four-phase framework for seduction derived from canonical seduction narratives, the argument demonstrates how the reinvented seducers have been stripped down, personalized, redressed, and recontextualized in narratives that seek to compel through seduction and educate through experience.

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INTRODUCTION

Ian Kelly prefaces his biography of Giacomo Casanova with a brief anecdote retelling Casanova's reaction to Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. "Seen it?" Casanova is thought to have responded to the inquiry, "I've practically lived it" (1). It is a moment that underscores Casanova's habitual wit and approachability, but it also says a great deal about the essential relevance of Don Giovanni. By the time of the opera's Prague premiere in 1787, the tragi-comic antihero Don Juan had been going to his sticky supernatural end for more than 150 years,[1] his cosmopolitan adventures advancing posthumously to occupy stages all across Europe. Yet Don Giovanni is not merely the subject of revival, like a Mirabeau perpetually parroting the same witticisms decade after decade in the same drawing room. Don Giovanni—or Don Juan, or Don John, as aliases vary according to the preferences and prejudices of the audience which consumes him—*gets rewritten*. He is tragic; he is comic; he is villain; he is hero; he is a killer, a rapist, a lover, a philosopher… He is, in short, an endlessly reconstitutable archetype.

But it was not just the eighteenth century that had such a lust for recycling the classic heroes of dirty didactic tales; the nineteenth century also revived Don Juan—among others—with gusto.[2] As we will see, the Spanish seducer was taken to the English everyman's bosom along with the dame and the devil of pantomime, before being elevated into something uncommon again in Byron's *Don Juan*; Valmont was promoted from subject of moral outrage to subject of analysis in Baudelaire's "Notes sur *Les Liaisons dangereuses*"; Tannhäuser was retrieved from medieval German obscurity and

adopted as a subject by everyone who was anyone, at least in Aesthetic circles, becoming a sort of variorum edition of himself. That these characters are both popular and persistent is obvious; what is less clear is why the nineteenth century should have turned to this kind of morally dubious character in particular, and renovated their stories.

One of the ways this question has been resolved critically is by discounting the immediacy of the nineteenth century's interest. In *Schooling Sex*, James Grantham Turner traces the lineage of a particular genre of libertine discourse—the erotic-didactic text, in particular the predecessors and variants of Chorier's *Satyra Sotadica*,—through its sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and early-eighteenth-century evolutions. Any nineteenth-century engagement with the type is confined to an epilogue subtitled "Afterlife and Retrospect." Though the epilogue nicely balances the prologue, which considers Chorier's formative impact on the adolescent Casanova, by noting the text's place on the shelves of the imaginary aesthetic libraries conceived by Baudelaire and Huysmans and its role as a foundation for Forberg's taxonomy of sex, the epilogue's treatment of these occurrences emphasizes their archival, rather than practical, deployment. The paragraph that briefly considers Chorier's reuse in Baudelaire's "Femmes damnées: Delphine et Hippolyte" and "Les Bijoux" lingers over the moments of direct translation, but appears to consider Baudelaire's reinventions of the source material half measures rather than valid evolutions: the first poem becomes "something doom-laden and infernal" (393) because of Baudelaire's inability to sustain true amorality; the second transforms "erotic metamorphosis into the detached, voyeuristic mode of the 'Museum'" (394)—it becomes a retrospective allusion rather than a contemporarily reinvention. In Turner's defense, his argument is heavily self-limiting from the outset—focusing only on the eroto-didactic

trope, the feminine point of view, and the early-modern timeframe—so it is reasonable that, as the fashion for the trope peters out, so does his interest. He also positions himself openly and aggressively in reaction to previous collections of libertine scholarship, those of Lynn Hunt and Catherine Cusset in particular, that seek to connect libertine literature with modernity. In spite of their "modern moments," Turner contends "my hard-core texts…have been weakened by anachronistic assimilation into genres like 'pornography' and 'the novel'" (395). This, I believe, underestimates the tenacity of such texts. Mere allusion may be chalked up to only a fashion for decadence or subtle intellectual aggrandizement, an erudite wink on the part of an author to a coterie of readers in the know; reinvention, however, in the manner of Baudelaire's poems, speaks to the kind of ongoing relevance to the nineteenth century also seen in the lineage of Don Juan—immediate, contemporary, and practical.

The intention of this argument is to demonstrate that nineteenth-century revivals of certain seduction narratives are more than just "archival" manifestations; they are eroto-didactic texts themselves, true to the tradition that Turner explores, but elevating the didactic effect outside the narrative itself, replacing the libertine instructor and the novice instructee of the seventeenth-century tradition with libertine text and novice reader of the nineteenth-century transformation. These texts are less about seduction than they are seductions themselves, and my intention is to treat them as rhetoric, to analyze their methods and, wherever possible, divine their aims. The seduction narratives in question are those concerning the characters mentioned earlier—Don Juan, Valmont, and Tannhäuser—and the focus of inquiry is into the manner in which they are redeployed in the works of four of the *enfants terribles* of the age—Byron, Baudelaire, Swinburne, and

Beardsley. These authors would have known libertine literature intimately—it occupied their bookshelves, is mentioned in their diaries, and headlined their theater programs and their opera nights. They would have been readers, just as cognizant of the means and methods of seduction as any of the previous century's consumers of Molière, Mozart, Choderlos de Laclos, or John Cleland. Initially, their reimaginings of libertine tales document their reader responses: how they negotiated the seductive inconsistencies in the source texts, and what imaginary realities—fantasy, philosophy, analysis, commentary, personal bias, wish fulfillment—they constructed within the gaps. These reimaginings stand, second and perhaps more importantly, as rhetoric, careful redeployments of those narrative strategies of seduction and control that libertine literature does so well, in hopes of promulgating carefully, pleasantly, perhaps even invisibly, some larger point about the world, turning titillating stories into eroto-didactic adventures, to address and rebalance the perceived inequities of morality and politics in a nineteenth century gone painfully conservative and powerfully dictatorial in reaction to the excesses of the French Revolution.

This argument presumes that some larger point must exist, even if its transmission in these often-incomplete projects was truncated or flawed; else why risk writing the book? The publication history of libertine literature is so fraught with prosecution and censorship, there seems to be no other reason to bother. In France, extensive censorship of libertine texts was already a feature of the years leading up to the Terror, in part because so many dirty books and illustrations also took pot shots at king and church.[3] In England, however, the comparatively lax common-law approach of the eighteenth century tightened significantly in the nineteenth. The Offenses against the

Person Act of 1828 consolidated a miscellany of pre-existing laws and clarified their punishments, lumping sodomy, bestiality, abortion, and bigamy in with piracy, kidnapping, assault, and murder as felonies. The anti-obscenity mandate of the Society for the Suppression of Vice (1802) was partly formalized in the Vagrancy Acts of 1824 and 1838, making obscene display (including illustrations) prosecutable as vagrancy, and completed in the Obscene Publications Act of 1857, which extended the ban to all print forms. Offending materials could be seized and incinerated, and offending purveyors brought up on charges. It was dangerous to sit down and write a dirty book, and the stringency of such legislation may account for the comparative tameness of Byron and Swinburne's work as compared to, say, the explicitness of Cleland's *Fanny Hill*.

In spite of the hazards, however, an eroto-didactic text based on a familiar libertine character has its advantages—in this case, popularity and promise. The libertine characters chosen for analysis and reconfiguration in these stories all have both a literary history and a degree of cultural currency: as we see later, Don Juan occupied stages almost continually from the early seventeenth century through the end of the nineteenth, in drama, comedy, and pantomime; Valmont's story, first published in 1782, was adapted for the stage as comedy in 1783 and as drama in 1834; once resurrected from his fifteenth-century mythology, Tannhäuser's experiences are committed to the page on various dates including 1799, 1827, 1836, and 1861, and to the German stage in 1845 and the French stage in 1861. To go to press with "the next" Don Juan or Tannhäuser story is to leverage an existing audience, with a predefined set of expectations that may be toyed with, built upon, or demolished, for rhetorical and didactic effect. To wrap the next Don Juan around a higher-than-usual ideal is, perhaps, to sugar a pill, both to preserve edgy,

countercultural appearances for one of a group of writers whose reputation are built, to one degree or another, on shock, and to entice audiences who may not necessarily willingly consume a more melodramatically moral novel—an Elizabeth Gaskell, say, or a Charles Dickens—on the grounds that it is too tame, too preachy, or too bourgeois, but would attend a pantomime romp, read a dirty book, or delight in having experienced the newest and most talked-about entertainments. The simple fact is that, at least until the end of the story when the messy retribution happens, most libertine novels feel good to read; closely related to pornography in their methods and effects, they rely heavily on reader identification to create feelings of titillation. Because readers seek these stories out for precisely that mimetic capability, many libertine authors recognized it as a powerful rhetorical and didactic tool—a kind of whore's dialogue between author and reader, where ideas may be passed along as salacious gossip. Narratives about sex can simulate sexual experience, as Ros Ballaster notes; narratives about seduction can themselves seduce. As readers of libertine stories, Byron, Baudelaire, Swinburne, and Beardsley would have been subjects of that seduction; as creators of fresh-conceived libertine adventures that challenge the political and religious dogma of the nineteenth century, they are in a position to co-opt and refine its methods. This is why, in the first chapter of this argument, I attempt to synthesize a coherent process for seduction from some of the diverse critical definitions and fictional depictions of seduction out there. Analysis of a selection of literary and philosophical arguments suggests that seduction has four distinct strategies: disarmament, personalization, enticement, and control; the remainder of the argument will examine how those four phases will be brought to bear in these nineteenth-century recreations.

The second chapter, for instance, shows how Byron works to disarm the reader and personalize the libertine by taking a well-exercised tale about the middle-aged adventures of a thoroughly dissipated Spanish seducer, the kind of character who is at best the butt of jokes and at worst dragged off to Hell by demons, and turning it into a peripatetic *bildungsroman* about a thoroughly nice, if feckless, adolescent everyman to whom sexual adventures occur inadvertently. He positions the reader between the too-worldly, too-sarcastic, evidently once oversexed but now superannuated narrator and the young, attractive, generally sweet-tempered Juan, undoubtedly aware that the narrator's biting tone and factual inconsistencies will pale, and perhaps irritate, in comparison to the boy's straightforwardness. Born of the confluence of the passions and the intellect, Byron's Don Juan knows nothing, is nothing, until a variety of unexpected and exotic sexual experiences shape him—and the reader who has identified with him—into a person with sufficient empathy to conquer the xenophobia and misogyny typical of his class, and sufficient intelligence to see through grandiose supernatural manifestations to the all-too-human self-service beneath.

The third chapter examines how Baudelaire redesigns the libertine to entice a democratic audience by reading between the lines, and the letters, of Valmont just as he was written by Laclos, but building into the gaps a personality with the potential for moral and philosophical growth. Through stringent application of those same tools that a successful *homme dangereuse* has already mastered—awareness of the mechanics of evil and the impulses of human nature—a libertine's sins may themselves become the path to virtue. In Baudelaire's notes, Valmont is decontextualized, isolated from the elaborate social circumstances of Laclos' story, aligned with Laclos as a kind of right-thinking

reactionary Republican, and recontextualized as a superlative combination of Baudelairean ideals—dandyesque self-awareness plus Satanic knowledge. What Laclos writes as emotional and procedural failings in seduction (failings that point up Valmont's second-tier libertine capabilities, especially in comparison to the Marquise de Merteuil's peerless single-minded destructiveness) Baudelaire interprets as the first quaking undercurrents of catalysis, of transition to something better—the redeemable man. "Voyez mon ouvrage," Valmont says, and Baudelaire would have the reader do just that: to look at his work as an exercise in free will, evaluate it with a clear eye, unpolluted by nineteenth-century romanticism, or worse yet, ignorance, and take note of its value, take note of it as a way forward and a philosophy to emulate both socially and politically.

The fourth chapter examines Swinburne's reduction of the Tannhäuser abduction—a story which usually travels back and forth between the real world and the Venusberg—into a long moment of reflection and a short moment of rejection, as a platform for the deployment of techniques for control. With "Laus Veneris," Swinburne reaches sideways, rather than backwards, taking up a popular tale of fairy seduction with medieval roots, which had momentarily entranced the aesthetic world. Its attraction is due in part to the seven-year gap in the tale that begs to be filled with the wildest debauchery that can be expected of a fallen pagan goddess, the kind of deviancy that Swinburne, with his literary predilections for lesbianism and masochism in classical draperies, seems just the poet to write, the kind of deviancy hinted at in the poem's Latin title…and delivered nowhere else. The poet fills the poem instead with inescapable reverie. Trapped in an eerily necrophilic lovers' clinch, the knight of "Laus Veneris" casts his thoughts back and forth across his own timeline, questing for solidity in his shifting perceptions, only to

discover that his memories of a faith that once supported him are themselves a lie. Swinburne locks the reader into the knight's perspective as if gripping the back of the reader's head; with nothing to look at except Tannhäuser's current and past perceptions, the reader is treated to an elaborate and systematic application of doubt that dissolves the moral binaries of a Christian past in the crucible of a pagan sexual present. The resulting psychological apocalypse—the ultimate discovery that divinity is accessible only through the form of the beloved—is as much a relief (and release) for the reader, as it is for the knight.

Finally, Beardsley works through all four phases in turn in the least complete seduction effort explored in this argument; so incomplete a narrative, in fact, that his ultimate aim is never entirely clear. He retreads the territory explored by both Swinburne and Richard Wagner—though it is Wagner's deficiencies, evidently, he means most directly to redress—but he exploits his unique position as both author and illustrator to create text and illustrations that challenge each other, creating a world of excess and inconsistency that systematically challenge the reader's beliefs about what they know of sex, what they believe about society, and the journey of experience itself. Beardsley's Tannhäuser is a thoroughly modern hero, the questing aesthete and voluntary student whose focus on form, rather than substance, undermines the seriousness of the varied and frenetic sexual activity in which he lustily participates. The illustrations show a boy—perhaps even an *effeminatus*—entrapped yet unaware of his bonds, poised on the brink of changes for which, with his lace cuffs and his walking stick, he seems ill-equipped. The text describes a society whose primary entertainment is sex, in the endless forms and variations one might see written up by Sade or by Richard Krafft-Ebing in the

Psychopathia Sexualis (or similar medico-sexual texts), as though the acts themselves were words allowed free play so long as they remain confined in the syntax that is the Venusberg. The illustrations are tame, even static, as though the sex has already become irrelevant even at the moment of its conception, a means rather than an end. In the space between the word and the drawing, the reader is supposed to negotiate the real story, the one which mimics Swinburne's story, only with the religious and sexual politics stripped away, the one in which the hero, broken over the rack of his experiences, sees beyond the primacy of form to the substance beneath, and the goddess, uncharacteristically submissive, passive, and sympathetic, becomes the haven in which he loses himself and finds redemption.

Though the minutiae of the conversions differ in their particulars, in broad terms Byron, Baudelaire, Swinburne and Beardsley apply the same methodologies in refashioning their libertine tales. They strip their heroes of those qualities which would devalue them or make them objectionable—age, agency, seriousness, or competition. They remove them from familiar contexts, destabilizing them, stripping them of their social milieu, sending them across the world, across the country, or across their own histories. They play down the mechanics of sex and play up its impact, emphasizing the myriad ways that sexual experience can break and remake a man. (Not that a female audience was uncommon, at this time or for these writers. However, given that women were already considered to be the primary consumers of novels, particularly gothic and sentimental ones; that the didactic aspects of libertine literature designed to warn women—the depiction of male aggression against weaker female victims—is missing in these reinventions[4]; and that the apparent message in these reinventions often has a

political or martial flavor, a male target audience would be both more challenging to appeal to and more valuable to coerce.) Though most of these works are unfinished, they still suggest, at least briefly, that the remade man is better—more sympathetic, more aware, more intelligent, more redeemable—than a virtuous man without such experience would be. The moral of all four reinventions is that vice, when experienced in its diversity, objectively, with the intellect engaged, can serve as a crucible, integrating the intellect and the passions so that they may act in accord rather than contention, effectively reintegrating the demon in man with the angel, to the benefit of both.

A digression may be necessary to defend the less-than-conventional choice to include Tannhäuser with the more traditionally libertine Don Juan and Valmont. The stories of all three characters may be classified as "seduction narratives," because each plot hinges on at least one seduction, although the term is unsatisfyingly vague, as it can also include sentimental, victim-focused narratives that exacerbate feelings of pity, empathy, or *schadenfreude* as well as more traditionally arousing accounts of seduction. "Libertine" and "libertinism," on the other hand, are too narrowly, yet still variously, defined in the critical literature by projects that encompass a variety of periods and a variety of nations; the only locus of temporal-spatial agreement appears to be eighteenth-century France, or what Feher calls "the licentious ways of the declining French aristocracy" (12). Peter Cryle and Lisa O'Connell carry the definition across the channel to include eighteenth-century Britain; Bradford Mudge and Richard Darnton extend the period backwards to the Renaissance progenitors of the English and French texts in which they are interested. Turner considers classical texts alongside Chorier. Hunt includes all of Europe including Finland, and with Cusset pushes forward toward

twentieth-century connections, though Hunt is tracing pornography rather than libertine literature, a distinction which is also fraught with problems. Cusset further complicates matters by distinguishing "libertinism" and "libertinage," and arguing for two sub-classifications of libertinage. The whole matter would risk devolution into an arcane and unusable taxonomy of distinction, save for Cusset's attempt to create common ground among the disparate positions of the arguments in her own collection: "…libertinage is text, not sex…libertine eroticism implies an esthetic relation among words, the imagination, and the reader" (12). Later she coins the suggestive phrase "strategies of seduction" (12). In an effort to avoid arbitrary exclusion of potentially enlightening texts based on year or place of composition, I wish to follow her example and widen the definition of libertinism (or narrow the definition of seduction narrative) to privilege structure over place—European stories which happen to be derived since the Middle Ages that take seduction as their primary focus and a moral, potentially admonitory universe as their context. Valmont, as an *Ancien Régime* aristocrat in Catholic France whose seductive projects ultimately kill him, is undeniably a libertine, and the position of *Dangerous Liaisons* in the canon of libertine texts is unassailable. Don Juan, as a Spanish aristocrat whose story is predicated on seduction and escape, also counts, although one may argue he is condemned to Hell for his hubris rather than his immorality. Tirso de Molina's original play gave birth to so many variants which have themselves entered the canon—Molière leading the charge—that *El Burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra* is frequently included under a sort of grandfather clause. As a thirteenth-century German minnesinger whose name became linked with a cluster of grail-paradise myths in the fifteenth century or later, Tannhäuser is less obviously a "libertine," especially as the

myth had little currency outside of Germany before the nineteenth century. Much of the "Tannhäuser tradition" is, frankly, down to Wagner. However, even in its fifteenth-century folk-song incarnation the myth is still a two-fold story of seduction: first, as a minnesinger, Tannhäuser's particular expertise is crafting love poetry, not out of personal interest, but to please an audience, making him a master of love as a system or a craft rather than an emotion; second, he is abducted, not by a fairy, whose charms might encompass a variety of magical experiences, but by Venus, a goddess with three defining features: paganism, power, and sexuality. Even in its early incarnations, the Tannhäuser myth is in effect the story of the forced seduction of an expert in love as a rhetorical art by an even greater expert in love as a manipulative art—a libertine contest structurally identical to that between "traditional" libertines Valmont and Merteuil. The weapons with which such a contest is engaged will be considered in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 1

SEDUCTION

In her analysis of the Valmont/Merteuil libertine contest, "'Les Liaisons Dangereuses': A Practical Lesson in the Art of Seduction," Valerie Minogue accounts for what she calls the novel's "powerful emotional fascination" with the contention that, in the novel, the act of seduction occurs on two levels simultaneously—the manipulation of character by character within the plot, and the manipulation of reader (who is "flattered, intrigued, baffled, and blandished") by text during the act of reading (775). She charts the seduction of the reader in two phases—courtship, in which the libertine philosophy is made to look heroic, and disappointment, when these putative heroes are shown to have feet of clay. For the purposes of my argument, the proposition that an analogy exists between the dynamic of libertine and victim and libertine text and reader is an intriguing one, as it permits me to borrow a language with which to describe the narrative changes made to the stories of Don Juan, Valmont, and Tannhäuser and to categorize their effects. The binary system of overture and movement she outlines, however, seems too simplistic. The intention of this chapter, then, is to build upon and complicate Minogue's taxonomy of seduction in order to generate a lexicon for seductive strategy, derived from both seduction theory and seduction narrative, that may be applied to the libertine reinventions of Byron, Baudelaire, Swinburne, and Beardsley.

The process of seduction is more often nodded to in the literature than explained with any kind of comprehensiveness. Critical approaches, for instance, prefer rather to define the concept, usually ambivalently, than lay out the steps for its deployment. Fictional seducers, so voluble on the mechanics of sex, say very little indeed about the mechanics of seduction. On those rare occasions when a seduction narrative includes a précis of seductive technique, as we will see later in the work of Laclos and Crébillon fils, it is often quite obviously incomplete; like a writer writing about bomb-making, there seems to be a concern about the dangers of too much verisimilitude. (Indeed, more is usually gleaned from watching what these libertine figures do than from listening to whatever little bit they say, especially as so much of seduction depends on verbal irony and dissimulation.) Nonetheless, if taken together, twentieth-century theory and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century self-revelation do appear to provide a coherent and surprisingly simple four-step methodology for seduction, a phased strategy of four steps—disarm, personalize, entice, control. Because seduction is, at its heart, a rhetorical practice, the deployment of discourse to manipulate the perceptions and attitudes of its victim, its strategies lend themselves nearly as well to a narrative environment and the relationship between writer and reader as to a physical environment and the relations between seducer and victim. Seduction becomes an excellent metanarrative technique with which to manipulate the reader, as Byron, Baudelaire, Swinburne, and Beardsley do, into entertaining and perhaps adopting novel, if not scandalously subversive, social and political perspectives.

Among critics, most definitions of seduction characterize it as a unilateral projection of physical power—essentially rape—where mastery of discourse is only one

of the many methods of implementation; only a few, Roland Barthes and Jean Baudrillard among them, treat it as a projection of power primarily through discourse; its physical outcomes are less important than the triumph of manipulation.[5] In Barthes, for example, perhaps because he is critiquing de Sade, the definition of seduction preserves an air of violence in the presupposition of an unwilling victim and a completely dominant master, but the control of the body is secondary to the control of language. In some of de Sade's more elaborate sexual scenarios, where victims have submitted, or been converted, to the practices of the master, or everyone seems to be buggering everyone else, it is sometimes difficult to tell who is the libertine in charge; for Barthes, that distinction is predicated on the possession of a will to discourse: "The master is he who speaks, who disposes of the entirety of language; the object is he who is silent, who remains separate… from any access to discourse" (31). The master of language is the master of people.[6] The Sadean libertine is he who controls and disposes of individuals the way a writer arranges words, in an infinitely mutable syntax of participants, orifices, and acts. The artistry in seduction is found in the imaginativeness of the arrangement, debauchery as story, and thus it is analogous to both the creation of fiction and to surrealist art. In seduction narratives, usually fictionalized accounts of seductions, it is the reader (who has the most omniscient perspective), rather than the libertine's victim (whose perspective is limited, likely preoccupied with the sexual realities of the moment, and in any case disempowered by the lack of access to discourse), who is the object of the seduction.[7] Seduction's ultimate effect is rhetorical rather than physical, arising not from the acts performed, but from the aggregation of inventive arrangements—in Barthes' words, from being the figure that "conceives the inconceivable" (37). Seduction is thus solely and completely artifice.[8] It

pretends a realism it does not possess, a condition that can only be maintained so long as the seducer can exclude reality and prevent comparison; for this reason, as Barthes points out, Sadean seductions are only ever set in a closed world—a locked cellar, a closed courtroom, a sequestered manor—where "social autarchy" can be maintained (17). Barthes' observations about the Sadean setting can be applied to other pornographic and seductive narratives; they are echoed in Stephen Marcus' construction of the "pornotopia," a narrative setting for pornography that treats the world it creates as a bubble or a body utterly without external context. This imperative for enclosure noted by Barthes and Marcus serves to manufacture the illusion of intimacy and interdependence between the seducer and the victim, an illusion that is leveraged psychologically in the conversion of the victim to complicit novice seducer.

Where Barthes' observations about seduction suggest only the possibility of a transfer of power from libertine to victim, Baudrillard's analysis in *Seduction* presupposes the continual transfer of power between seduction participants. In the course of a seduction, power is projected, undermined, and reversed; the line between seducer and victim muddies as the seduction continues. Seducer and victim arrive at a state of complicity because both become, in the end, aware of the existence of the secret of the seduction (although the goal of some seductions is the revelation of this "secret" and the public shaming of the victim). For Baudrillard, seduction is uncertainty, power undermined by knowledge, and as such, is a feminine principle in that it defies the formal (masculine) order represented by sex. Like Barthes, Baudrillard finds seduction inextricably bound up with imaginative discourse; taking a shot at Foucault, for whom sex and power were fundamentals, he makes the claim that "seduction represents mastery

over the symbolic universe, while power represents only the mastery of the real universe" (8). The symbolic universe is fundamentally frangible; the immutable qualities upon which the formal order is based (class, power, nation, heritage, perhaps even gender, intellect, and tastes) are shown to be mutable and may be manipulated and overturned at will. (This is why, in the libertine reinventions discussed in the remainder of this argument, the author's first move is usually to strip the hero of all of his identifiers early in the text. These identifiers create a semblance of difference between the reader and the hero, impeding identification; the perception of otherness intrinsic to social, economic, or national stratification can too easily be misinterpreted as threat, undermining the seduction before it has even begun.) The problem with realism in a symbolic universe is that it cannot be real; the uncertainties of seduction are so fundamental to the world that things that present themselves as real—Baudrillard notes both pornography and overt sexual invitation as examples—are too apparently truthful to be actually true. They must, instead, refer to something other than themselves. Order, certainty, sexuality, and the real are thus illusions of the symbolic; the pretense that motivates seduction is instead an operation that is what it aspires to be—perversely, the operation with truth value.[9]

In theory, then, seduction is shown to be a process based upon pretense (the illusion of weakness, usually, or at least safety), requiring enclosure (either physical sequestration or the perception of an exclusive relationship), and intending control (although those intentions may not be consistently fulfilled.) It is an expression of the agility of the mind, rather than the gonads, a bringing of the intellect to bear in service of the imagination to undermine the targeted order and fulfill the self-interest. In practice, fictionalized accounts of seduction—since predicated on dissimulation, there can be no

factual account—bear this out. As noted previously, fictionalized seduction narratives are routinely incomplete in their explanations of the mechanisms of seduction. The libertine pedagogue Versac's lecture on the topic in *The Wayward Head and Heart*, for instance, postpones proceedings as soon as the conversation turns to women—"If you are as eager to learn as I am to instruct, we shall easily find an opportunity"—but that opportunity never comes. The meat of the matter is never discussed, the object of interest (889). Consequently, fictions tend to emphasize techniques of pretense, enticement, and personalization rather than control and follow-through. Versac lays out a long-winded schema of affectation by which the would-be seducer can move through, and take advantage of French society at will. For Versac, this very long-windedness is a virtue, as discourse is one of the ways society negotiates and transfers power. He provides an example in which a man's military conversation is superseded by a woman's amatory philosophy, which is in turn overtaken by another woman's licentious ditty, resulting in a moral lecture that is cut short in turn by gossip, political agitation, gambling stories, and finally personal remarks (888-9). Though Versac's explanation gives lip service only to society's empty-headedness, his example lays out a much more fundamental understanding of the workings of the society in which he moves and the way society preserves itself. The threat of consequential ideas is mitigated, individuals with inconsequential minds are flattered and included, virtue is nodded at, and stability in a system of divergent capabilities and motivations is maintained. The trick for the would-be seducer is to learn how to insert himself into the discourse at the right moment and with the right content to achieve his aims without appearing to disrupt or preempt the stable deployment of power. This is perhaps why, as Valmont notes in Letter 34 in

Dangerous Liaisons, seduction is best conducted via conversation rather than in print; speech presumably permits the seducer to react more immediately to the changing circumstances of the discourse.[10] Leo Weinstein boils down Versac's advice on managing society into six precepts: "eagerly embrace all fads of the moment," "be different at any price," "study other people without revealing yourself," "be overbearing and overly self-confident," "assume the *bon ton* of good society," and "make a noisy display" (41-4). Versac's seducer masquerades, like a wolf in sheep's clothing, not just as a peer to his prey, but a peerless example—a little more sophisticated, a little more innovative, a little more *au courant*, a little more attractive. The seducer is the bait in his own trap; the mark of a good male seducer is that the prey does all the apparent pursuing. As Søren Kierkegaard's unnamed seducer in "Diary of the Seducer" remarks, "…when one can arrange it that a girl's only desire is to give herself freely, when she feels that her whole happiness depends on this, when she almost begs to make this free submission, then there is the first true enjoyment…" (51). The mark of a good female seducer is, as the Marquise de Merteuil lays out in the much-discussed Letter 81 in *Dangerous Liaisons*, the ability to feign insusceptibility to pursuit while secretly picking and choosing the overtures to which one succumbs. The aim of seduction, in these fictional accounts, is thus the appropriation of power; mastery requires the sophisticated, practically invisible, deployment of the twin arts of dissimulation and enticement.

A seducer's first priority must be to ensure admittance to his target's world without arousing the suspicions of either the object of seduction or her caretakers. A variety of pretenses may be used—the appearance of irreproachable social or moral virtue, idiocy, avuncularity, adolescence, impotence, or powerlessness, the excitation of

pity, or even a well-timed personal recommendation. Some even rely on well-placed honesty. Versac, for instance, recommends the talking of piffle because it gives him the appearance of good breeding—what he calls "negligence of demeanor" (887)—and allows him to move among those he hunts unremarked. Valmont is introduced to Cécile, whom he will seduce at Merteuil's behest, in the company of the child's mother at a dinner party given by a woman who is perceived to be of impeccable morality and breeding, even though the scheme for the child's corruption is secretly hers. At the home of his doting aunt, Valmont approaches Tourvel, to whom he openly confesses certain aspects of his profligacy, offering himself flatteringly as an object of pity, ripe for her moral guidance. In Letter 4, he flatters Merteuil with terms of submission, even though his intent is to replace her plan of seduction with an even more enterprising scheme of his own. Kierkegaard's seducer spends visit after visit in the sitting room with his target's aunt, precisely so that the girl does not come to think of him as a suitor. Seductive narratives disarm using similar tactics. *Dangerous Liaisons* is framed with not one but two critical prefaces decrying the text's value, the publisher criticizing the verisimilitude of the setting, ironically asserting that no such events could occur in the present, and the editor condemning it for the apparent defects of style and substance, which, but for its usefulness as a moral example, would ordinarily have resulted in the text's suppression. The framing would have the reader assume the text he or she has not yet read is "safe," because of its deficiencies, but fails to consistently argue the nature of those deficiencies: its pitiable failures at realism and relevance—not about current conditions, not about truth, satisfying to very few, with very little to recommend it save the lessons taught by the fate of Tourvel and Cécile to avoid the society of an "unprincipled man," it cannot

help but be deficient literarily—or its lack of appeal to any readership other than that swathe of individuals flatteringly described as neither "libertine" nor "puritan," neither "freethinker" nor "devout," and not excessively "fastidious" (941-2). In a word, reasonable. Crébillon fils' *The Wayward Head and Heart,* on the other hand, is framed with a preface that trumpets the text's moral value, purporting to offer an example of redemption, a story where a man who is first a victim of inexperience and then of corruption is ultimately to be saved, "restored to himself, owing all his virtues to a good woman" (770). In truth, the novel never reaches that third and desirable stage; like a lover who promises marriage but never gets around to buying the ring, its interests are revealed to be solely that of defloration and corruption. Casanova's autobiography, *History of my Life*, perhaps the world's longest sustained seduction in print, augments the natural intimacy of the first-person perspective with a charmingly direct declaration of its own motives in the preface: "I want you to know me before you read me" (17). Casanova would rather be judged on his manner than his actions—he wants to be liked. Yet it drops the honesty almost immediately in favor of unctuous flattery, building a case for the reader's unassailability:

> I have not written these memoirs for those young people who can only save themselves from falling by spending their youth in ignorance, but for those whom experience of life has rendered proof against being seduced, whom living in the fire has transformed into salamanders. Since true virtues are only habits, I can say that the truly virtuous are those happy people who practice them without any effort. Such people have no notion of intolerance. It is for them I have written. (23)

Like that of Crébillon fils, Casanova's readership is defined by who it is not, in this case the intentionally uninformed. Instead, like Madame de Tourvel, Casanova's reader is to believe him or herself too experienced, too virtuous, too intelligent to be corrupted by

exposure to the unexpurgated details of the libertine life; more experienced, perhaps, than the libertine himself.[11] The seducer is powerless in the face of such practiced virtues; the reader can thus afford to be tolerant, to be sympathetic, to engage fully and completely in a text that is rife with contradictions, omissions, and space for reader participation.[12] This preface frames a narrative that frames its own events by the pretense of a mature narrative voice recounting the adventures of youth, a configuration of perspective that assists the reader in forgiving any perceived defects in the character by implying that the character has grown beyond these deficiencies.[13]

Voluntary participation in the seduction by the seduced is what makes seduction, in the view of the libertine, an art. Without voluntary participation, it is merely rape. Voluntary participation is invited by the twin practices of personalization and enticement; personalization creates the appearance of an individual, unique, and intimate relationship between the seducer and the seduced, and enticement creates a reason for the seduced to seek out and pursue the seducer and thus, ultimately, be at fault for the seduction. Versac accuses Meilcoeur of inadvertently personalizing a relationship with a woman of his acquaintance: "When a man of your age visits a woman like Mme de Senanges, appears in public with her, and permits a correspondence to be established, he must have his reasons…She must think that you adore her" (878). He has mistakenly given her the illusion of "intimate connection" and "warm friendship that resembles love in its pleasures," and so she pursues him. (What Versac realizes, although Meilcoeur does not, is that Senanges is ideal as a means of entree into better society, and the seduction should continue for precisely that reason.) Once the appearance of an intimate relationship has been crafted, enticement may be achieved through self-valorization; "…the only object of

a man of our rank and your age," Versac opines, "is to make his name celebrated," ideally in the arenas or society most likely to attract the notice of the seduced (881). In the early days of his seduction of Tourvel, Valmont takes advantage of the duty of houseguests to amuse themselves in order to speak extensively and intimately with the pious lady, confiding his faults and accepting her lectures (and her surveillance) with good grace. Thus, when he is seen to pay off the debts of a family hounded by bailiffs, she interprets as virtue an act that he claims to Merteuil is machination, and allows herself to entertain an attraction that makes it that much harder to accept the warnings of her friends and divorce herself from Valmont's company and communication. In his seduction of Merteuil, the pretense of an intimate relationship is already well-established at the beginning of the story; the flatteringly informal tone of the letters between them provides proof. The challenge, then, is to force Merteuil to drop her pretense of libertine collegiality and reveal her desire for him, an event that can only be precipitated by demonstrating his unquestioned dominance in a pursuit that will garner her respect—libertinage. Ironically, it is for the purpose of attracting Merteuil that Valmont first alienates her by refusing the seduction of Cécile in favor of the seduction of Tourvel. The corruption of Cécile, an inexperienced schoolgirl, is no particular accomplishment in libertine terms; the corruption of Tourvel, a retiring and pious wife, is. If the accomplishment is sufficient, the direction of attention should change; Merteuil is meant to value Valmont precisely for denying the lesser project that she proposed. She should, in effect, adopt his way of thinking, a necessary precursor for the final step in seduction, control. Unfortunately, Valmont underestimates his quarry, perhaps because her proficiency with dissimulation, laid out in Letter 81, thwarts his ability to personalize the

relationship accurately; her burning resentment of his defiance ultimately preempts the appeal of his conquests, and his seductive efforts fail.

In order to seduce the reader, a seduction narrative—either the original libertine work or the nineteenth-century reinvention under discussion in this argument—faces the same sort of challenges in creating a complicit object that Valmont faces with Merteuil. A narrative can never be quite certain of its reader, so it cannot tailor its interaction as closely to the reader's proclivities and appetites as one might like. It may cope either by depicting material to appeal to a variety of different proclivities in order to personalize for a variety of possible readers, or else by leaving space in the narrative for the reader to create his or her own intimate experience. Libertine literature, as at least a close cousin of pornography, already assumes a degree of reader complicity; otherwise a reader would have put the book back down rather than read it through. Though it is often freighted with any amount of extraneous characteristics, Rousseau's "one-handed read" is only made possible through the reader's intense identification with the circumstances and one or more of the characters in the sexual situation.[14] Such narratives are frequently constructed to maximize the possibility of this identification by providing multiple character types and various and diverse acts, in order to satisfy individual preferences and individual desires as much as possible. For instance, de Sade's *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, an explicit orgy in seven acts with a politico-philosophical interval, offers the reader choices for identification that allow him or her the opportunity to satisfy a variety of personal criteria—males and females, heterosexuals and homosexuals, virgins and whores, dominants and submissives, seducers and rapists, aristocrats and servants, as well as a laundry list of sexual activities including (but hardly limited to) sodomy, incest,

lesbianism, masturbation, voyeurism, medical sadism, coprophagy… If these laundry lists of sexual proclivities fail to provoke the required level of reader involvement, a viable alternate strategy is the deployment of the gap, a narrative uncertainty used to good effect in eighteenth-century novels, and to excellent effect, as we shall see later, in the nineteenth-century reinventions under discussion, which filled the gaps found in their progenitor narratives with new stories—the multiple seductions of the adolescent Don Juan, the emotional development of Valmont between the letters, the transformative influence of Venus and the Venusberg upon Tannhäuser—better designed to disarm, entice, and personalize the seductive experience. In *The Act of Reading*, Wolfgang Iser posits gaps, intentional or accidental, as a novelistic tool that prompts the reader to actively and continually reconstitute meaning in order to maintain a coherent visualization of the story. Such "papering over" of inconsistencies can be seen, for instance, in the whore's dialogues of the late seventeenth century, which often utilize a phased approach, deploying multiple interchanges between the instructor and the instructee with periods of absence in between. The gaps permit the sexual instruction to be organized logically, frequently by topic and according to skill level; it also allows for significant changes to occur in the personality or motivations of a character without significantly disrupting the logic of the story. *The School of Venus, or Ladies' Delight*, for instance, is separated into two dialogues. The first dialogue is the basic premarital lesson, where Frances (the wife) trains Katherine (the virgin) in the theory of sex. The second dialogue comprises the practicum and the advanced course. Katherine is back, no longer a virgin, to retell her sexual experiences with Mr. Roger, and Frances puts her through a series of oral exams on the language and methodology of intercourse before

introducing advanced postmarital topics including what to do if pregnant and the merits of a well-conducted adultery. The warning at the end of the first dialogue that "I hear Mr. Roger a-coming," together with Frances' stated intention to "prepare and give him his lesson" (24-5), foreshadow the narrative interruption; the reader is permitted, if he or she so chooses, to pause and imagine what comes next. Here the text sketches in broad strokes what is to come, but leaves the details up to the imagination, and the proclivities, of the reader. The gap also allows the reader to be privy to multiple encounters and multiple perspectives in ways that he or she is not in a continuous narrative like Daniel Defoe's *Roxana*, which is limited to serial presentation of sex acts and the single point of view.[15] Because of the gap, and the transition to a second plot with a new protagonist, Katherine can change from the dubious and ingenuous virgin of the first dialogue to the experienced, enthusiastic, and functionally perfect lover of the second believably (or as believably as dialogues like this need to be), without requiring a Damascene conversion to get her there.

The gap may also be used as a tool for enticement, an intentional silence deployed in order to insinuate a better construction of a person's identity, motives, or actions than events themselves provide, sometimes in defiance of all expectations. Casanova, for instance, uses a strategic silence to distract the reader from a perhaps less-than-salubrious background and to put him or her, instead, in the mood for approval. After a long and, biographers contend, largely specious genealogy[16] and a romantic paragraph about his parent's elopement, little is seen of young Giacomo Casanova or his family between birth and the age of eight, that pivotal moment when Casanova is taken to Murano, is cured of both his nosebleeds and his mental deficiencies, and apparently becomes a thinking

being. Casanova converts what would be a narrative of self-definition—the who, what, where, and when of family relationships—into an epistemological problem that undertakes to foster belief in a rational consciousness called into existence by magical practice. He is sympathetic to the reader's doubt: "After the journey to Murano and my nocturnal visit from the fairy I still bled, but less and less; my memory developed, and in less than a month I learned to read. It would be ridiculous to attribute my cure to these two absurdities, but…" (30). The vast shadow over his childhood that precedes this event allows the reader to construe one of two possible explanations of Casanova's development, a medical one or a supernatural one.[17] A reader who is Casanova's contemporary and peer—there is no indication in his tone or language that he envisions himself speaking to posterity—is no more likely to plump for the rational explanation than the supernatural one; Casanova's was the age that glorified Rousseau, Voltaire, Cagliostro, and Saint-Germain in equal measure. Casanova magnanimously accommodates either preference. But he then ever-so-neatly reconciles the paradox:

> As for the appearance of the beautiful queen, I have always believed that it was a dream, unless it was a masquerade deliberately contrived; but the remedies for the worst diseases are not always found in pharmacy. One phenomenon or another demonstrates our ignorance to us every day. I believe it is for this reason that nothing is harder to find than a learned man whose mind is entirely free from superstition. There have never been wizards on this earth, but their power has always existed for those whom they have been able to cajole into believing them such. (30)

If the reader believes, even for a moment, in Casanova's "magic," then the reader believes in Casanova as wizard. Casanova resolves the contradiction regardless of preference by first presenting the pill of belief coated in the glaze of logic, then the pill of reason in the glaze of faith, and also, for any as yet unconvinced, adding an appeal to authority. So, regardless of whether the reader was a dyed-in-the-wool atheist or a

habitual salt-over-the-shoulder believer, he or she has been manipulated, through careful management of the possibilities of the gap and a little astute argumentation, into acceptance of the coexistence of the logical and the metaphysical—an acceptance which will be awfully useful later in the narrative when the reader is asked to look upon Casanova's alchemical dabbling (or the chicanery so presented) with an approving eye. Likewise, in Laclos, gaps give the reader the opportunity to explore his or her preconceptions and, perhaps, acknowledge more "wizardry" from Valmont than events might themselves account for. An experienced reader of libertine literature, for instance, interprets Letter 21, Valmont's account of his stratagem to pay the debts of an evicted family as ingratiation, as truth, and Letter 22, Madame de Tourvel's recapitulation of the same event as evidence of his virtue, as misguided naïveté (969-72). The reader reconciles this initial inconsistency between described motivations by accessing his or her store of accrued knowledge about the character and his or her understanding of how libertine texts work—there are seducers and there are victims and the victims never, ever see the seducers coming. It is not until the reader is faced with Letter 138 that the discrepancies between accounts might begin to destabilize the reader's conviction. When Valmont writes the marquise, "I insist, my love: I am not in love…" (1197), the reader likely begins to wonder if the writer protests too much, merely because it is so out of character for Valmont to insist on anything. Compel, certainly; but verbal insistence is the refuge of one who cannot do anything constructive to achieve his ends, and Valmont had previously been full of constructive stratagems. The duel, the forgiveness of Danceny, and release of secret correspondence pre-mortem are even less in character. Is this merely the fulfillment of the marquise's plot to destroy Valmont? If so, why should

Valmont concede to his victimization, all but throwing himself on Danceny's sword, when the boy had previously been so open to manipulation? Is this Valmont's final stratagem to destroy the marquise? Is the duel, instead, merely a method of suicide by another's hand, a means of getting his message out in a way that would ensure it gets retold? The inconsistencies here, the things the reader does not know for certain, have been skillfully managed to force the reader, whatever his or her initial opinion of Valmont, to reconsider both the character and the reader's own ability to read character effectively. Valmont the rationalist may be seen to succumb fatally to emotion, or to have perpetrated a skillful seduction; Valmont the strategist may be seen to fail and sacrifice himself unnecessarily, or to put across the ultimate revenge; Valmont the manipulator may be seen to have manipulated the circumstances of his suicide, or been manipulated to his death. As we will see in a later chapter, Baudelaire's "Notes sur *Les Liaisons dangereuses*" tackles these inconsistencies explicitly, exploiting them to suggest a more exalted vision of Valmont's heroism than Laclos likely intended—an informed and practical bravery, both satanic and dandyesque, to use Baudelaire's terms, and thus a model for the kind of fully cognizant moral and political thinker missing and much needed in nineteenth-century France.

Once an apparently intimate relationship has been forged and the quarry enticed into the seducer's grasp, the seducer is free to exert control over the victim's thoughts, aspirations, and perspective in order to fulfill whatever ends are desired. Kierkegaard's seducer makes control the mark of a competent libertine: "He who does not know how to compass a girl about so that she loses sight of everything which he does not wish her to see, he who does not poetize himself into a girl's feelings so that it is from her that

everything issues as he wishes it, he is and remains a bungler…" (59). He becomes his victim's world. Versac's lecture on seduction is deferred before it can broach the subject of control, but given that the novel ends with Meilcoeur giving lip service to his love of Hortense while sleeping (repeatedly) with an older woman who can assist his passage through society, it may be that Versac is not himself a bungler, at least as it pertains to his seduction of Meilcoeur. Valmont achieves total control of Cécile, deflowering her, dictating her love letters for her, and instructing her in a variety of deviant practices under the guise of usual marital relations, the better to offend her future husband with. His control of Tourvel is only partial; she submits willingly to his sexual advances, but then retreats from him to places he cannot pursue her or control—first into herself, then into a convent, and finally into death. He bungles his seduction of Merteuil; in spite of his success in both the seduction which she directed and the one he undertook to impress her, she refuses his attentions, offended that she is third after the "heavenly" Tourvel and the "attractive" Cécile. She snaps the thread of intimacy in Letter 127 by intimating that, as his invitation is only the latest of many invitations to join a "seraglio," he is, himself, merely the latest in a series of forgettable suitors—less young, less devoted, less valuable to her (1179). It may be that this seduction fails because Valmont has been gone too long and is too far away; he simply lacks the primacy and the proximity to Merteuil to effectively exclude any other considerations than his own will and his own viewpoint.

If narratives have handled the personalization stage of the seduction properly, control of the reader should be very easy indeed. After all, any story automatically defines the world in which the reader participates and the reader has already agreed to participate in that world by the very fact of reading. So a reader who chooses to read a

story of seduction, libertinage, or pornography has, in a sense, arranged to meet the Devil at the crossroads, already made him or herself complicit in the production, not just of meaning, but a particular kind of meaning, with particular and very personal physiological effects. The only necessary consideration is to avoid pushing the reader too far too soon in pursuit of the seducer's intentions. Ideally, material that will deviate from the reader's experience and cause uncertainty should be introduced gradually, and without too much declarative intent—a gap should be left to provide room to doubt. This gives the reader time to renegotiate the reality of the narrative continually, often without noticing; the reader's experience one hundred pages in to the story should not the same as the experience he or she had on page one because negotiating each uncertainty requires a redesign, however slight, of the previous imagined reality. Each redesign is inflected by a subjective experience that has been altered by participating in all the previous negotiated realities. The gap becomes a didactic technique.

Casanova handles this beautifully on those occasions in his autobiography when he begins to deviate from traditional consensual heterosexual relations. When Casanova depicts his potentially less popular adventures—those involving homosexuality, pederasty, or violence—he coerces the reader into that position of acceptance or rejection typical of all libertine texts, but permits the tiniest bit of doubt to undermine the completeness of any dismissal. Ted Emery's study of three potentially homosexual interludes in the autobiography (the relationship with Bellino, the "castrati" who turns out to be a girl in drag; the importunities of Ismail, his Turkish host; and the encounter with Lunin, the effeminate Russian soldier) points to the author's subversive deployment of doubt, concluding that the aim of these anecdotes is to undermine the presumption of

essential heterosexual identity, as it "disempowers the male reader and threatens to constitute him as the subject of a homosexual experience" (40). It has, in essence, allowed the reader to toy with the idea of homosexual experience without having to commit unequivocally to it.[18] In the story of Bellino, it is Casanova's reaction to the state of the castrato's sexual organs. The reader is teased by an ongoing use of the male pronoun when referring to the girl, as well as the provocative caveat that, "In this conviction [that Bellino was female], I made no resistance to the desires which he aroused in me" (192). Convictions are, after all, so often wrong. When Casanova discovers what he believes to be the singer's maimed penis, he reacts violently, but it is not clear to what: "I saw that Bellino was in truth a man; but a man to be scorned for both his degradation and for the shameful calm I observed in him at a moment when I ought not to have seen the most patent evidence of his insensibility" (201). Even in translation this is a difficult sentence to construe: is Casanova scornful because Bellino is a man, because Bellino is maimed, or because Bellino is unresponsive? The first provides a position for identification for a heterosexual male reader, the second for a heterosexual female reader, and the third for any type of reader at all. Though Bellino is ultimately revealed to be female and responsive, and Casanova's heterosexuality and prowess confirmed, the narrative has nonetheless introduced the possibility of homosexual experience. His later relationship with the young Russian Lunin is similarly freighted with doubt. Much like Casanova in his efforts to ingratiate—"like an intelligent youth he not only defied prejudice, he deliberately set about winning the affection and esteem of all men of position, in whose company he was always to be found, by his caresses" (990)—Lunin appears to be more of a practical homosexual than an essential one. The

Russian's beauty convinces Casanova that he must be female, a misapprehension that the boy is at pains to dispel. The declaration and subsequent genital display occur in front of a female audience, a Parisienne that Casanova clearly does not like, and in spite of the subsequent exchange of "tokens of the fondest friendship" (991), which may equally well be taken as an exchange of rings or of ejaculations, the entire incident reads very much like a schoolboy prank devised to thwart unwanted female attention. Thus the reader is free to dally with the hint of homosexual exchange, while ostensibly having the homosexual subtext explained away.[19] The matter of pederasty is likewise explained away as an aesthetic, rather than a purely sexual, choice; his own desires for, as well as his efforts to obtain, juvenile bedmates tend to remain undescribed. The crime of procuring children is never his; it is the parents who sell their children, or sometimes the girls who sell themselves, in exchanges of more or less explicitness.[20] The girls are inevitably dutiful, and frequently enthusiastic, participants. On the rare occasion Casanova himself initiates a bargain, it is to sell the child up the social ladder, as in the case of "O-Morphi," or Maria Louise Murphy, whose three-year liaison with King Louis XV, which ended in a gift of 400,000 francs, Casanova claims to have orchestrated. (He even appears to have been instrumental in getting Boucher to do the famous painting of her naked behind, though that itself creates a gap.)[21] Casanova presents himself as having clearly done the girl a favor, and had even paid the mercenary adolescent 300 francs for the pleasure of *not* deflowering her little sister. The elision of physical desire as a motivation allows the reader to play, as Casanova does, with the fantasy of nubile virgins while skating comfortably past the grubby realities of child molestation—youth is admired, parents and children both eat, everyone is treated marvelously and, if all goes

well, retires to the country with a fortune. In this manner, Casanova retains control of the reader's experience regardless of the reader's reactions to the behavior being described. If the reader is enticed by the prospect of homosexuality or pederasty or any other behavior hinted at, there is room in the narrative to redesign the experience to make it fit, to enjoy the moment; if the reader is repulsed, the narrative itself provides excuses, explanations, alternative readings that allow the reader to back away from the idea without withdrawing from the text.

This brief examination of both the practices of fictional seducers and the methods of seduction narratives suggests that, contrary to Merteuil's claim, seduction works just as well in writing as in conversation; it is, in fact, practiced over and over again in print by writers looking to overcome objection to salacious material, generate identification with difficult characters, manufacture appeal for corrupt societies, and keep the reader engaged in the libertine world the narrative builds. Byron, Baudelaire, Swinburne, and Beardsley, all students of these kinds of narratives, recognize and employ the power of these strategies for a subtly different purpose—to challenge the perceived insufficiencies of nineteenth-century political and social strategies for the inculcation and legislation of morality. Though some authors favor one stage of seduction over the others when rewriting their seducers for nineteenth-century audiences—Byron, for instance, makes extensive effort to disarm the reader, while Swinburne privileges control—as we shall see, all four construct seduction narratives that themselves perform the seductions they describe.

CHAPTER 2

A PRACTICAL EDUCATION: BYRON'S DON JUAN AND THE INGENUE'S JOURNEY

Although the strategies of seduction are, in theory, four discrete stages to be progressed through systematically, in practice they are often intermixed and repeated, tailored to suit the characteristics of the victim and the ultimate aims of the seducer. Though Byron's changes to Don Juan include moments that work on the reader to entice and control, they function primarily to disarm the reader, turning what is traditionally a profoundly arrogant and openly manipulative character into one that is affable, appealing, and perhaps even a trifle ineffectual, and to personalize the seduction, updating what is a fundamentally antique and foreign morality tale with sufficient contemporary allusion to function as a comment on, and challenge to, nineteenth-century political and religious dogma. Byron's target, the reader of *Don Juan*, would approach the poem for the first time presuming her or she already knew the nature of the character and the outlines of the plot. As Moyra Haslett notes, early marketing of the poem leveraged familiarity with the story and the expectation of licentiousness by publicizing only the hero's name, and many contemporary reviews were preemptory in their consideration and tainted by preconceptions about the piece built on previous versions: "The periodical reviewers were duly alarmed—'merely' by the title…" (78). Once the identity of the "anonymous" author got around, the poem became self-promoting, as the expectations of licentiousness

were further sharpened by the knowledge that this poem was written by that notorious rake, Lord Byron, from his Italian seat of exile, after the lurid affair with Caroline Lamb and the much-discussed dissolution of Byron's marriage. Many readers may have expected Juan's libertine adventures to veil a tell-all biography, or at least a defense of the poet's behavior, and there are several moments in description of Donna Inez in Canto I where Byron appears to be complaining about his ex-wife, so that may have been one of the motives behind the choice of subject matter. Indeed, the re-creation of the libertine Juan as a comparatively guiltless juvenile adventurer may have been intended, in part, to tar the poet with the brush of innocence, because the literary tradition Byron drew from, which includes works by Tirso de Molina, Molière, Pierre Corneille, Thomas Shadwell, Carlo Goldoni, and of course Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, as well as contemporary pantomime versions, all depict the eponymous antihero as a man of indeterminate (middle) age, but of well-honed libertine skills.[22] Byron undercuts these expectations seductively, disarming the expectant reader by presenting Don Juan as a youth—so young as to be as yet intellectually and sexually unformed, so young that a reader might indulge as mistakes those actions that would be seen as sins in an older character. Byron also makes Don Juan likeable, bleeding the seducer of all lascivious intent, while framing the narrative within a commentary penned by an untrustworthy and salacious speaker-poet. Byron personalizes the narrative experience for the reader, first creating a sense of intimacy through a change in literary form and then familiarity through contemporary literary references and increasingly realistic modern settings. Stripped by his picaresque wanderings of all his determinist identifiers—class, nation, language, even gender—Juan becomes free to remake himself in whatever mold is most enticing: in this case, the

rational man. Only the appearance of control is missing; while the reader is forewarned of the time and place of Juan's eventual reckoning, no such judgment occurs; Juan (and the reader who has coexisted with him on his journeys) finds himself a free agent in a rational world, unrestricted by divine control—an existence Byron himself must have craved.[23]

The Birth of Don Juan

The opening of the poem promises the reader, in fine Versacian tradition, both frivolity and novelty. Frivolity, in that the main character is a familiar literary construct, only just released from pantomime, still with the whiff of burlesque transvestitism and violent harlequinade; novelty, in that the speaker-poet plans to provide a hero whose heroic exploits are bound to transcend those of the real army, navy, and revolutionary heroes of all the recent wars, a long list of whom fails to be "fit for my poem (that is, for my new one)" (I, v), perhaps because they are not, themselves, new. By 1819, the publication date of Canto I, these men are well-known and their histories are recorded. They are also, for the most part, dead and thus static personalities, susceptible to no further development. Such inertia recalls the historical treatment of Don Juan himself, a seducer whose inability to change—to repent, specifically—condemns him to an ugly eternity in hell. In *El Burlador*, for instance, the playgoer meets Don Juan for the first time in the act of leaving Isabela's bedroom, where he has slept with her in the guise of Duke Octavio. His true identity is revealed to Isabella and the audience simultaneously, so the first experience for the viewer is not the progressive sequence of seduction, conquest, and fulfillment, but the reductive act of dropping the pretense. His history, which is not revealed until halfway through the first scene by his uncle, is less a

biography than a rap sheet: "Your father sent you from Castile to Naples for committing the same crime against a noblewoman there. Italy gave you asylum, but still you continue with your scandalous life, sparing neither single nor married women. And now, with a duchess, in the palace itself!" (I, i). De Molina provides no justification, genetic or psychological, for Juan's lothario habits, save that he is young (though not so young that this is a first offense), a charge which, taken in conjunction with his premature end at the hands of the stone statue, suggests that womanizing is a symptom of arrested development and Juan is a kind of Peter Pan. Molière's play also introduces Don Juan in the act of departure, but here the story is related second-hand. The playgoer is introduced to the absent character, not through a litany of crimes, but a litany of synonyms to rival any thesaurus entry, as Sganarelle speculates on the libertine's abandonment of Donna Elvira. "…[Y]ou behold in my master, Don John, , the greatest Libertine that the Earth ever bore, a Madman, a Dog, a Devil, a Turk, an Heretick…who lives like a downright Brute-Beast, one of Epicurus' Swine, a true Sardanapalus…a Marryer at all Adventures…"(I, i). Don John is not so much a character as a concept, a signifier that connotes a specific collection of vices, impieties, and betrayals for use in a larger, stage-based syntax of relationships and results, and he is a busy one at that. Befitting just such an anti-ideal, this version of Juan is not even credited with a proper family. Where de Molina is generous enough to create an uncle and a father against whom the libertine might be seen as a wayward youth rebelling, Molière writes Don John as the product of the Earth's parturition using a throwaway phrase which is nonetheless fraught with implicit fixity of nature. A man who is said to have feet of clay has a propensity for vice; what, then, is one to make of a libertine who is inherently all clay? Furthermore, to be

born of Earth is to suggest being called up out of the ground like a stone or an artifact, a thing devoid of a human context. It should not be surprising, in fact, that Don John fails to atone when given the opportunity; in his own way, he is built to be just as monolithic and immutable in his shamelessness as the statue that invites him to dinner and repentance.

Unlike these other static heroes, however, Byron's Don Juan is a novel thing, a seducer who begins the story fundamentally undefined. By naming the poem, and the character, traditionally, Byron takes advantage of reader experience as a mechanism of appeal—if the reader saw Don Juan in one of the (mostly humorous) previous appearances, and liked him, or heard about the play or the pantomime from a friend, well, here the scalawag is again. Expect hijinks and *schadenfreude*. By introducing the character through a list of all the heroes he is not using, however, Byron's speaker-poet apes the tropes of the tradition by creating a kind of genealogy that establishes, not who Don Juan is, but who he is not. By identifying all the roads not taken, Canto I busies itself in both undermining reader expectation, saying, in effect, "I may have gotten you here under false pretenses, but the next part is going to be really interesting," and creating in the story a new gap, one in which the character exists only as undefined potential. The canto, like the reimagined tale of Don Juan himself, apes the libertine tradition and sex itself by beginning with a need that is assuaged by the arrival (in the sense of both literary creation and actual birth) of the infant seducer, at which point the speaker-narrator drops this pretense of poetic creation in favor of the semblance of biography, crediting Juan with a proper birthplace and a detailed parentage. In previous incarnations, the reader was presented with a Juan full-grown and predetermined; here, Juan seems to be given

substance and background by the act of reading itself, suggesting a valorization of change in this poem that is not present in any of its forebears.

Juan's early biography continues to tease, appearing to be always on the verge of reiterating or reinforcing the Don Juan tradition, but ultimately undermining it with a barrage of new experience. As a setting, Seville is a traditional choice drawn from *El Burlador*, but the dalliance with his home city is temporary, and Juan will tour a new land (Persia, Russia, England) in nearly every subsequent canto. The incomplete family hinted at by de Molina is here completed, and stripped of its *patriarcha*, by the addition of a mother-in-fact, though not necessarily a mother figure. This aggregate of progenitors also turns out to be conveniently allegorical. The mother, Donna Inez, is initially defined as a figure of intellect: "His mother was a learned lady, famed/ For every branch of science ever known…" (I, x), but that assertion is qualified by an explanation of the limitations of her knowledge: her facility with Latin extends only to a single prayer, her Greek to the alphabet, and her contemporary literature to a couple of Spanish playwrights and some French novels. Outside of her preference for math, her capabilities seem sufficient for little more than bible-reading, a convenience given that she was both "a walking calculation" and "morality's prim personification" (I, xvi), a cognate reinforced by the shared rhyme. Read allegorically, this characterization of Donna Inez implies a narrative bias that believes that traditional Christian morality—the kind that knows its Lord's Prayer in Latin and its Greek letters from the altar cloth—is evidence of an artificially limited reason. Yoked to such a figure by holy sacrament is José, a character about whom comparatively little is said, except that "He was a mortal of the careless kind…/Who chose to go where'er he had a mind" (I, xix) and that gossip suggests he had multiple

mistresses. Indiscretion, impulsiveness, and a disregard for learning and thus reason are all qualities attributable to a personification of the passions, particularly when placed in opposition to a character like Inez, who is all about the intellect. Even José's final illness seems significant, as "the tertian" is a kind of fever with intermittent and thus inconstant symptoms, suggesting perhaps that the father had died in the same manner that he lived. While much is made in the text of the pair's desire for separation—Donna Inez attempts to have her husband declared insane, presumably in order to have him committed, and Don José's choices are said to be limited to "death or Doctor's Commons," where divorce cases would have been heard—the way they achieve it is through death, suggesting a subtextual commentary on the impossibility of a truly passionless reason.

This new Don Juan, then, is not just a product of new class rules, the union of a bluestocking and a Hidalgo, he is also the product of two philosophical allegories, human motives usually thought divergent, if not combative. Although the speaker-poet has dropped the pretext of literary construction in favor of this-boy-I-knew storytelling, Juan himself continues to exist in a literal and theoretical mode simultaneously. In the Don Juan tradition, the narrative is driven by the practical and repeated application of the passions, assisted in varying degrees by the schemes of the intellect. Yet this Juan's education is effected in such a manner that neither passion nor intellect may be cultivated effectively. Though Donna Inez has sole charge of her son's education and might be expected to mold him in her own intellectual image, the moral project informing her curricular choices promotes an almost antirationalist agenda. Don Juan is taught nothing at all about the world as it presently exists; instead, his languages are "dead," his science "abstruse," and his arts irrelevant (I, xli). He is given no information of any utilitarian

nature, which means he has no preconceived ideas about how the events that one normally addresses using practical knowledge are meant to occur. He has no preconceived notions about anything, in fact, because his training in belles lettres is positively bountiful by comparison with his education in the natural sciences—he is given no natural history instruction and tutored in classics from bowdlerized texts. Though the speaker is quick to convey that all the expurgated content is conveniently accessible in a single salacious appendix, that addendum is there for the benefit of "the ingenuous youth of future ages" rather than Juan, the ingenuous youth of the present age (I, xlv). Juan's devotional is devoid of decoration, his mother retaining control of the one ornamented with the "grotesques" that "kiss all"; even his awareness of the saints is flawed by the omission of St. Augustine and his confessions. So while Juan might be considered a child of grace, he is clearly also a child devoid of the material with which to manufacture any kind of practical immorality. Sheila J. McDonald attributes this impulse to authorial motivations, saying, "The poet would have us believe that his passive, bungling protagonist is the only 'true' libertine, for the experienced seducer whom the world sees is really an innocent seducee at heart… Juan, therefore, seems to represent that private part of the poet, and by extension the interior life of the libertine, which the world refuses to acknowledge. In ridiculing tradition, Byron is, in a sense, coming to grips with it" (296). It is difficult to say whether the ridicule that McDonald sees is truly a result of Byron's authorial critique, or rather a practical means of disarming the reader. Juan may share the name of the great Spanish seducer, but he certainly lacks the culpability. Byron designs such an imperfect childhood for Don Juan in order to make him an object of sympathy, rather than disapprobation, and to create other loci of blame

for Juan's immorality than the libertine himself. Byron continually emphasizes Juan as the victim of someone else's inadequacy: an incomplete practical and religious education, a contentious family life with incompatible parents, and a lineage tainted by class betrayal. Conveniently, this means he lacks any real allegiance to those attributes of order discussed in the first chapter (class, race, even sex) that Baudrillard claims are fantasy, attributes outside of which seduction operates. De Molina's Don Juan is a threat to his world and may be blamed by his audience for his hubristic impiety, his intentional immorality, his lack of fidelity to his family and open defiance of his father, and his leveraging of aristocratic privilege at the expense of duty and honor; Byron's Don Juan is a threat to no one and may be blamed by his reader for none of these sins because he lays no claim to the qualities they sin against. Molière's Don Juan might be a signifier of vice, impiety, and betrayal; Byron's Don Juan is a signifier of nothing at all, except perhaps adolescence: not class, not family, not intellectual pretension, not even sexual competence.

Juan's inoffensiveness is in direct contrast to the louche and knowing lasciviousness of the speaker-poet. McDonald is, after all, one of those youth of future ages who would, in the narrator's prediction, have access to the unexpurgated classical texts, much like the speaker himself, and may see Byron writing schism where he intends complete differentiation. The speaker-poet is not Juan at a later date, but instead a distinct and separate character, as revealed through his extensive editorializing and propensity for discursus. Many, many critics praise the narrator persona—Anthony England finds him Fieldingesque because of the primacy of his commentary (*Byron's* Don Juan *and Eighteenth-Century Literature*), Bernard Beatty describes him as "an essentially reliable

critic of all he surveys" (136), and Elizabeth French Boyd celebrates the discursive, allusive, "not to say confidential and even chatty" tone as a distillation of Byron's own engaging improvisational manner (46-7). In the introduction to *Don Juan*, Leslie Marchand argues that Byron felt his reputation as a poet too much tainted by the moody emotionalism of *Childe Harolde* (Marchand terms it *weltschmerz*), the poem that made his career, and at the time of his Italian exile was looking for a mode of self-expression more appropriate to his own persona; the Augustan sarcasm of the speaker balanced against the innocent sentimentalism of the hero gives him the greatest possible latitude for personalization. The speaker's inconsistencies are consistently seen by these critics as fundamental to the promulgation of Byron's satire, evidence that, in spite of expectations to the contrary, there is no truth to be found in the world. It is true that the extensive and sometimes heavy-handed intrusion of commentary into the story allows the narrative to operate simultaneously in two modes, narrative and critical. It is also true, as M. K. Joseph contends, that the separation of hero and speaker allows for the coexistence of emotional engagement and rational (if not omniscient) objectivity (32). The speaker-poet may even be seen, in simplest terms, as an intellectual foil and counterpoint to Juan's unmoderated and unanalyzed needs. Yet for readers who are not in the business of reconciling inconsistency in the quest for innovative argumentation, the speaker must seem troublingly unreliable, if not outwardly deceptive. After negotiating the transition from the meta-poetic consideration of Don-Juan-as-literary-construct to Don-Juan-as-character-with-pretense-to-heritage-and-position in the first canto, the speaker then awkwardly—and briefly—inserts himself into the story, on the very stairs of the family home occupied by the infant Juan, calling into question the level of reality over which the

speaker-poet has authority. If the speaker-poet writes, and thus can be expected to control, the narrative, he can also be expected to understand it; if the speaker is not in truth the poet, and only occupies the narrative reality, then his authoritative claims are only as reliable as those of any other character; he has no more insight—and is thus no less fallible—than his ingénue hero. Frederick Beaty sees this fallibility as a selling point, a humanizing quality in the speaker that should appeal to the reader (128). I contend instead that, in a setting like Don Juan's, a fairytale past brought up to date and personalized for its readership by nearly continual allusion to recent events, such unreliability would be alienating; together with the arrogant tone, the contentious cynicism, and the louche interests, the speaker's persona seems purpose-built to drive all but the most practiced libertine reader searching for an object of identification into the arms of the much more personable young hero.

Unlike the engagingly fallible Juan, the speaker must seem troublingly antisocial to many readers, and this may be key to the speaker-poet's function in the narrative—he is there to present the reader with an artificial choice with a predictable outcome. As already noted, when describing the paucity of Juan's education, the speaker-poet goes out of his way to demonstrate his familiarity with all the dirty bits in classical literature—even in bowdlerized editions, which suggests he went to the trouble to seek them out; he is cosmopolitan enough to attempt to encapsulate the difference in sexual habits between northern and southern climes[24]; he is also, apparently, an atheist:

> But whether Glory, Power, or Love, or Treasure
> The path is through perplexing ways, and when
> The goal is gained, we die, you know—and then—
> What then?—I do not know, no more do you— (I, cxxxiii-iv)

Most damningly, perhaps, he is openly self-aggrandizing and rude to the reader, in one breath placing himself in the company of Dante, Solomon, Rousseau, and the like by pointing out the similarity of their messages—"this life is not worth a potato" (VII, iv)—and in the next breath placing the reader in the company of dogs, who apparently fare better by the comparison (VII, vii). Though his delivery becomes more critical and less louche over the course of the narrative, his function in the early cantos seems to be to express himself so odiously and at such length in criticism of those articles of faith that a reader might be expected to hold dear, including morality, religion, existential human value, and the supremacy of mankind over the animals, that the reader recoils… into the sphere of the kinder, gentler, more innocent, and above all uncritical Don Juan. The speaker-poet is not a character who has been stripped of his preconceptions and then remade by experience; he is, if anything, a character so confirmed in his beliefs that he no longer notices the inconsistencies of his position or the inadequacies of his rhetoric. Louche, vain, and dissimulating, this speaker-poet seems at times an adequate representation of the libertine villain as was, the dirty-minded, self-important manipulator-turned-rapist as found in de Sade or even de Molina, so confirmed in his strategies of discourse, however inappropriate, that the mark of his excellence, the willing capitulation of his victim (in this case the reader) is no longer relevant. His unreliable, lascivious, critical commentary is exactly the bitter pill that makes the picaresque sexual misadventures of the comparatively innocent Don Juan, accidental Lothario, far easier to swallow. He serves as another method of seductive disarmament; he becomes the danger in the room, such an obviously immoral influence in the narrative he draws attention away from the immoral influence that young-Juan-the-libertine and his adventures might

otherwise pose. By comparison, Byron's hero appears more feckless, more adolescent, more unassuming, and less of a threat.[25]

This appearance of ingenuousness, which is so attractive in contrast to the suspect observations of the speaker-poet to any reader who is looking to identify with a "nice guy," is, of course, the thing that ultimately fits Juan for vice; fortunately, by the time Juan is first exposed to the sins of the flesh, the reader is well-primed by extensive disarmament to forgive him most indiscretions. Juan is, after all, apparently a victim in his initial sexual encounters. Granted, it can be said of seduction that, before the seducer seduces the victim, the victim must first seduce—or at least draw the attention of—the seducer. As shown in Valmont's seduction of Madame de la Tourvel in *Dangerous Liaisons*, it is simultaneously the unassailability and the desirability of the victim which makes the seduction a triumph. Though Byron assigns all seductive culpability in Juan's first sexual encounter unequivocally to Julia, Juan is primed by the circumstances of his development so far to receive her attentions, much in the same way continuous contact with the abrasive speaker fits the reader to look kindly on the hero. The seduction itself is a stock scene from romantic theater—there is a dark night, a river, a book of Renaissance poetry, a pretty girl—but Juan's attentions are firmly fixed, not on physicality, but on physics:

> He thought about himself, and the whole earth
> Of man the wonderful, and of the stars,
> And how the deuce they ever could have birth;
> And then he thought of earthquakes, and of wars,
> How many miles the moon might have in girth,
> Of air-balloons, and of the many bars
> To perfect knowledge of the boundless skies; —
> And then he thought of Donna Julia's eyes. (I, xcii)

Clearly in this passage Juan is not planning romantic activities; he does not seem to have the nominative vocabulary to frame the thought. He is, however, aware of what might be called the algebra of sex—the terms are unknown, but the interaction between them is rendered familiar by some kind of physical law, perhaps passed down from that allegorically passionate father figure. He has the space in his head where the intercourse would fit. Juan thinks of the physical world in seductive terms: the planet is possessed by man; the stars are born, not created; images of roundness are everywhere, so it is air balloons rather than ships at sea and astronomical statistics reckoned in terms of distance around rather than distance between. This innate comprehension of the interaction of bodies—which the speaker coyly refers to as "the action of the sky" and ascribes as the equal product of both sexual and mental development—further underscores the inability of the intellect to police the totality of human existence. In spite of the limitations of his education, in spite of the absence of the father and thus passion's exemplar, in spite of the tyranny of the mother and thus intellect's model, Juan still has the capability, the tools, and the spaces in which vicious inclination can fit. Here Byron seems to be anticipating Baudelaire's condemnation of moral literature—the problem with modernity is not moral education, it is the underlying assumption that ignoring immoral education will somehow make immorality disappear.

It is a particularly trenchant irony, then, that Juan's first practical encounter with the immoral should turn out to be the result of Julia's attempt to validate her own virtue. In response to a desire born of Juan's adolescent comeliness, Julia first vows avoidance, but then opts instead for a self-test:

> She now determined that a virtuous woman
> Should rather face and overcome temptation,

> That flight was base and dastardly, and no man
> Should ever give her heart the least sensation,
> That is to say, a thought beyond the common
> Preference…(I, lxxvii)

In order to prove virtue, in Julia's view, a woman must first confront the substance of her temptation; avoidance is itself an immoral act. Ideally, confrontation results in diminution, the trivialization of the impulse, but even if the circumstances are not ideal, "…there are such things as Love divine,/ bright and immaculate, unmixed and pure…" (I, lxxix). The flaw in Julia's logic that leads to Juan's eventual seduction is not one of premise—confrontation is necessary if temptation is to be truly overcome, rather than merely put off—but of warrant and a too-limited pool of conclusions. Divine love is, by definition, the province of divinities, and man is neither divine, nor immaculate, nor unmixed, as Juan's parentage and Julia's heritage demonstrate, so the conclusion that a confrontation between this woman, however virtuous, and any man, however common, would result in such celestial sentiment is illogical. Likewise, Julia's assessment of outcomes is inadequate by a full third; her thinking accounts for both the best case intellectual outcome—virtue and relationship obsolescence—and the best case emotional outcome—virtue and a deepening of feeling—but avoids the best case physical outcome, which is the fulfillment of her bodily desires. Her test is thus constructed to beg the question of her own purity, so while the impulse to examine temptation is laudable, the results of that examination are marred by personal bias. In spite of the speaker's willingness to blame external factors including love, summer, moonlight, Julia's husband's age, and Plato, the reason Julia succumbs to temptation is that she fails to understand it. Even at the last, she lies: "whispering 'I will ne'er consent—[she] consented" (I, cxviii). But, as Andrew Rutherford points out, the lie is more or less the

point: "[Byron] sets himself the great satiric task of demonstrating, both in jest and in earnest, the reality that lies behind the self-deceptions, the pretenses, the illusions, which we normally accept so readily as the whole truth" (146). Byron stages a test of the powers of intellect to cope with morality so that the reader can find those powers wanting. Unlike Juan, whose metaphysical musings denote only receptivity and thus the potential for eventual clarity, Julia is shown to be perennially intellectually self-deluding and ultimately self-serving, as her speculation about Juan's prospects at the time of a future and hypothetical widowhood indicates. Clearly the history of personal experience and moral instruction that permits Julia to frame the problem of temptation does nothing to help her avoid it, because she continues to fail to avoid it for months, until, in a scene drawn directly from de Molina, her husband discovers Juan in her bed. Unlike de Molina's version, however, the husband is not then killed in a duel, so Juan's subsequent flight from Spain, when it comes, looks less like exile than rebirth. Juan is first expelled from Julia's room as the infant is from the womb, naked, in a hurry, and in the dark. He is then expelled from his mother country, by his mother, to "mend his former morals, and get new" (I, cxci), a curious choice of phrase since it was indicated clearly during the early stanzas that his inculcated morals were strictly doctrinal, and his experiential morals derived from a brief and passive relationship with Julia. While old morals might be repaired anywhere by renewed religious instruction, what new morals could he acquire in a tour of European, and thus largely Christian, countries? After all, this solution is in direct contrast to the speaker's enthusiastic endorsement of punitive measures at the beginning of the second canto, which enjoins those "who teach the ingenuous youth of all nations…/ I pray ye flog them upon all occasions—/ It mends their morals…" (II, i).

Inez's capricious intentions are the first direct indication that Juan's story is intended to be more than just a picaresque adventure; to leave a Christian country to tour other Christian countries with an intention of acquiring some new kind of moral experience suggests that, even in an environment governed by doctrine, alternative moral perspectives exist and familiarity with them is somehow desirable, even to a bounded intellect like Donna Inez's. Juan's exile will be the making of him, quite literally; Juan's reader, by this time thoroughly disarmed by the alterations to his character, sympathetic by virtue of his continuing bonhomie, and indulgent of his indiscretions because of his clear lack of culpability, is engaged by the prospect of novelty, ready to pack a suitcase and accompany the libertine on the Grand Tour that will, unexpectedly, strip him of his remaining signifiers and remake him as a man who can understand the truth of the world.

Byron does so much work disarming and enticing the reader by infantilizing the libertine's character, designing the speaker as an antithetical frame, and recasting the seductions to create alternative culpability, it is easy to overlook the efforts invested to personalize the narrative seduction for the reader, especially as those changes are buried deep in the structure of the narrative, at the level of form and plot. These changes are worth considering, however, because they help to preserve the sense that the narrative is an intimate interaction, in spite of the breadth of Juan's travels and the length of the poem, and a relevant one, in spite of the apparent exoticism of Spanish aristocrats, Turkish harems, and Persian cities to the average English reader. The first, and most obvious, change Byron makes is to turn a plot that was previously a play—drama, comedy, or pantomime—into a poem. A reader's previous experience of Don Juan would have been either in the theater or through reading a published script, both isolating

experiences. For the playgoer, the story would be, at best, a voyeuristic experience, conducted in company and thus fundamentally public. The viewer's reactions are thus tempered by the constraints of public behavior. The character would, by necessity, be predefined by the choice of actor, the costume, the staging, and the direction. The audience sees the body rather than imagines the form, deducing the motivations rather than intuiting the thoughts. The performance realizes the director's and actors' visions; the viewer is left to accept or reject the dramatization.

By contrast, a published poem has the potential to be vastly more intimate, more flattering, and more involving. It is individual intercourse. Unless experienced through a public reading, poetry is consumed in the private space behind the reader's eyes. The work of visualization is left to the reader, as is the speed of consumption; the reader can pick up, put down, re-experience, or reimagine at will. The poem has infinite scope for setting, character, or action, without regard for the practical limitations of theatrical staging. A poem can expand the possibilities of perspective to third-person omniscient or even first person; it can also appear to speak directly to the reader, as Byron's poem does, capitalizing on the conversational rhythms of *ottava rima* and a nearly endless and rambling progression of cantos to simulate an long, intimate chat with a voice who is advisor, lover, or seducer.

The second alteration Byron makes to personalize the poem, to heighten the perception of both intimacy and immediacy, is to update the setting of the narrative gradually as the plot progresses from the distant Spanish past to the turn-of-the-nineteenth-century English present. In the opening cantos, although the speaker-poet is shown to be a nineteenth-century product with his litany of past dead generals, some

from battles recently in the headlines, there is little to disturb the presumption that this new Don Juan is any less a seventeenth- or eighteenth-century aristocrat than his predecessors in the tradition. (Juan's brief consideration of hot-air ballooning in the initial stages of his affair with Julia suggests eighteenth-century timing, likely very late in the century when ballooning started to look like a viable practice rather than an insane experiment, but such fleeting references are easy to overlook.) His later adventures—shipwrecks, pirates, a bit with a harem—do little to alter the perception of "long ago and far away." By the Siege of Ismail, however, Don Juan has been brought nearly up to date, if not close to home; most adult readers would be old enough to have heard of the 1791 battle. By Canto XII, he is both close to home—the reader's, not his—and up to date, in England, in a ruin of a medieval house that would be familiar to many early nineteenth-century readers, at least as the moldering pile up the road. Through this progression, Byron advances Juan's examination and critique of the world from the more comfortable focus of then and there to the less comfortable one of here and now. A reader who has been lulled by the fairy-tale trappings of Juan's foreign adventures may awaken from complacency to discover that it is his or her life and values that are suddenly under attack. Alternatively, the reader may not wake at all, internalizing the condemnation of London and the games played by the Duchess Fitz-Fulke with the same ease he or she accepts the condemnation of the harem and the schemes perpetrated by Gulbeyaz.

The point to disarmament and personalization is to bring the victim—the reader—within reach of the seducer—the poet—and to create the appearance of an intimate relation between them; after that, during the enticement phase, the seducer is free to scrutinize the victim continually for signs of diminishing receptivity, and to time various

enticing displays for best effect. With Byron's narrative, this is true on two levels. Since the poem was published serially, the publication phase was prolonged. By the point in the narrative that Don Juan is being shipwrecked, abducted into seraglios, and besieged, Byron is receiving regular feedback on the text first from his publishers and then from his readers. (His publishers, as we will see later, were frightened indeed.) Later cantos are thus the product of compromise, of that passing back and forth of power that Baudrillard notes characterizes seduction, between Byron and what he wanted to say and his readership and what they wanted to hear. Within the text, the enticement phase is prolonged partly because so much work has been done to make the seducer unthreatening, there is little left with which to entice. Impenetrable innocence is only interesting briefly; it must be challenged, fall, and change to merit sustained attention. This phase is also prolonged because this act of building an enticing character is necessary to carry out Byron's ultimate political critique condemning externally imposed moralities: in order to model the way men should be, Don Juan must be forced into circumstances that invite self-determination. His adventures in exile achieve this, challenging the primacy, or in Baudrillard's terms the reality, of the most common social signifiers by stripping him of all the distinctions that would normally predetermine his position as a being of power, all the distinctions that define the traditional libertine—nation, class, language, and finally gender.

Although Juan's banishment and the subsequent stripping away of his power shares picaresque qualities with similar exploits in de Molino and Molière, in Byron's iteration they are freighted with more philosophic import and less narrative exigency.[26] In *El Burlador,* for instance, the shipwreck is merely a means to transition the setting

between acts and get Juan's head in yet another woman's lap. It is manufactured offstage by means of a shouted "Help! I'm drowning" during the fishergirl Tisbea's soliloquy about her own disdain, a speech of such length that even the inattentive playgoer must realize that irony is in the offing. Then a dripping Juan, carried by his valet, finds himself thrust into the scene and into verbal intercourse with the girl, who even recognizes the potential for danger and betrayal when she calls him "my Trojan horse, come out of the sea" (13). There is neither philosophy nor poetry, not even much thought, in the seduction of Tisbea—Juan's patter seems formulaic and reactive, derived from what must be only a cursory examination of his surroundings and the things he hears. Waking damp and in a woman's lap, his speech is peppered with images of death at sea and sirens; when Tisbea says, speaking of her own desire, "you promise a scorching flame," Juan responds with the words "charred," "scalding" and "burn" in the next three sentences, foreshadowing the eventual immolation of Tisbea's virginity and then her house. The seduction seems to be no more than a means for the seducer—and the playwright—to fill up time and keep in trim. In Molière, the same scene seems to be an excuse to stage incredulous peasants for comic effect. Pierrot relates the tale of the shipwreck to Charlotta as evidence of his own heroism, but his valor is suspect: though he sees the shipwreck victims swimming, he only sails to their rescue after winning a bet regarding their existence. Like Tisbea, Charlotta seems a touch diffident about love, but the sentiment is conveyed, not through a self-assessing soliloquy, but through Pierrot's illogical contention that she must not love him because she fails to play tricks upon him. Don John himself does not make an appearance until the beginning of the next scene, and when he does he is in full command of himself. His ravishment of Charlotta is, if

possible, even more formulaic than the seduction of Tisbea, because it lacks metaphors entirely and seems to take no account of the particular woman complimented. Charlotta is told that her whole self and her body are "fine," her eyes are both "fine" and "piercing," and her hands, black with dirt, are the "finest in the world." Her teeth are peculiarly designated "amorous" and her lips "provoking," by which he presumably means they together provoke an amorous response in him, as Charlotta has as yet said nothing at all contentious (70). The inadequacy of his rhetorical technique makes it seem as if Don John has provided himself a list of suitable adjectives for amorous occasions and now applies them willy-nilly to the various presentable appendages a woman is expected to have. Don John expends less effort winning Charlotta's favors than he does boxing with Pierrot over the insult. As in *El Burlador,* this episode has little in the way of literary depth or philosophical content; the long speeches to which both Don John and Sganarelle are prone only recommence once they have escaped the peasant village in advance of a dozen pursuers. The whole affair seems to be little more than an intermezzo between the crime of Donna Elvira's abandonment and the punishment of the nodding statue.

In Byron's poem, instead, the shipwreck is an entire drama in itself, one which compromises both Juan's national identification and his pretensions to class. It takes more than one hundred stanzas to cover the same narrative period de Molina dispatches in a single exclamation, "Help! I'm drowning," from Juan's embarkation in Cadiz to his deposit on the shores of Haidée's pirate island. Those hundred stanzas chronicle a transition during which the budding libertine empties himself, in stages, of what little remains of his Spanish adolescent existence—emptiness being a necessary condition before he can be filled and remade. The narrative continually reemphasizes the

universality of Juan's responses. First he empties himself of tears, crying from grief over the loss of his mother, his lover, and Spain. "…[H]is salt tears dropped into the salt sea,/ 'Sweets to the sweet'…" (I, xvii), the speaker remarks, quoting *Hamlet,* creating a slew of associations in the mind of even a semihabitual playgoer, and linking this journey with Ophelia's death, because both are arguably a product of illicit liaisons and both are a shift to a new state of being. He then empties his stomach from seasickness, a universal human experience and a condition that is "death" to the passions, at least according to the speaker:

> But worst of all is nausea, or a pain
> About the lower region of the bowels;
> Love, who heroically breathes a vein,
> Shrinks from the application of hot towels…(II, xxiii)

Evidently a lover may bleed romantically, but he may not vomit romantically, and he certainly may not suffer a problem of the bowels and remain a romantic figure; this contradiction suggests that, like so much else with immorality, there are some aspects of the human condition whose existence is commonly believed unfit to acknowledge in sensible discourse. Love is an idealized concept, separate from the messy realities of the physical form like emesis and excrement, and cannot, the speaker proposes, survive such exposure. Rutherford sees this as a moment of self-delusion: "showing how [Byron's] hero, in all sincerity, exaggerates and falsifies his feelings, and how those feelings… can soon be dissipated by sea-sickness, bowel complaints, and other vulgar illnesses" (153). What Rutherford does not acknowledge is Juan's persistence, because just as with his contradictory capacity for immoral activity in the absence of immoral knowledge, Juan is able for a time to maintain the contradictory states of love and nausea simultaneously. Even heaving his guts out over the rail of a ship Juan seems the model of some better,

more complete human being. The strength of his love notwithstanding, this seasickness counts as a further stage in the process of emptying begun with lamentation. In the third stage, it is the ship that is emptied, as water is pumped from her hull and the masts cut down to keep her from sinking. These efforts fail, and she is emptied of people as she sinks. Juan, adrift in a longboat, begins a course of starvation, the fourth stage. While other survivors consume all available sustenance—shoes, caps, a spaniel, even Julia's farewell letter—Juan abstains for various sentimental reasons which set the precedent for refusing meat when the crew turns to cannibalism and sacrifices his tutor Pedrillo: "'T was not to be expected that he should,/ Even in the extremity of their disaster,/ Dine with them on his pastor and his master" (II, lxxviii). Juan loses everything he possesses on this journey including his society, his memory, and even his most basic sustenance; it is as if the gaps manifested in his early education have expanded to make him a kind of walking absence, space within a shell of humanity. By refusing to dine on Pedrillo, "pastor" and "master," Juan is effectively refusing to fill that space with either religion or contemporary notions of adequate education. It turns out to be a wise choice, because the ingestion of Pedrillo's flesh drives its consumers mad; no doubt this is meant to be a trenchant commentary on the dangers of church and college. Incidentally, traditional education as personified in Juan's teaching master is not to be confused with the kind of education by experience Juan has tasted at Julia's hands and is about to receive in abundance. In utilizing a "hydraulic theory of education" not unlike Byron's dynamic of emptying and refilling to structure her study of Gide, Segal notes a unidirectional flow of most models of education that apes traditional heterosexual sexual mechanics: the master is donor of knowledge, the pupil the receiver. This practice is consistent with the early

stages of libertine pedagogical discourse as found in whore's dialogues, as Turner's analysis indicates; however, in whore's dialogues as well as *Don Juan*, that flow becomes increasingly bidirectional as the novice develops expertise. Until now, Juan has been, in effect, "the girl" in his relationship with his tutor, his mother, and the world; had he not been seduced by Julia and then exiled, that condition would have persisted until he achieved his majority and turned the tables on that dynamic in accepted male-dominant fashion. (His refusal to be nourished by his tutor's body may be a spark born from that abandoned expectation.) His sexual experiences, on the contrary, have allowed, at least occasionally, for bidirectional flow across divisions of both age and sex—Juan fills as well as being filled; is sometimes master, sometimes slave; can be both victimizer and victim. But the majority of such complications are in Juan's future; for the moment, as he washes up alone on Haidée's isolated beach, he is utterly empty, receptivity personified, a state signified by his loss even of speech.

As Inez's program of education followed Juan's birth, so Haidée's follows Juan's rebirth. Juan's condition in the second half of Canto II is not unlike his condition in Act I, Scene 3 of *El Burlador*—wet, insensate, and in a woman's lap. But in Canto II it is Haidée who is accompanied by a servant, not Juan, and it is Haidée who has both initiative and the power of speech. She endeavors to fill the emptiness within him with practicalities—first with warmth, then with dream, then with food, and finally with language. Juan is reeducated, not through books, but through experience of the female physiognomy:

> And now, by dint of fingers and of eyes,
> And words repeated after her, he took
> A lesson in her tongue; but by surmise,
> No doubt, less of her language than her look;

> As he who studies fervently the skies
> Turns oftener to the stars than to his book,
> Thus Juan learned his *alpha beta* better
> From Haidée's glance than any graven letter. (II, clxiii)

The metaphor of the stargazer in this passage recalls Juan's highly sexualized astronomical contemplations before his first encounter with Julia, an affair which proceeded in spite of the gaps in his understanding. The juxtaposition of that reference with the idea of an alphabet suggests that, in this affair, some of those omissions are meant to be remedied, particularly since such remedy involves prolonged close contact with, and study of, the lady's person. Here, perhaps, is the first lesson in Juan's new morality. Haidée's illiteracy prevents her from teaching him theory of any kind; she only has access to practical and current experience, and her role as both "Nature's bride" and "Passion's child" makes her instruction a viable complement to Inez's program of math and moral stricture in the same way that the applied sciences augment the pure. That first kiss, for instance, is characterized as an act of integration, the kind "[w]here Heart, and Soul, and Sense, in concert move…" (II, clxxxvi). A common language is then developed: "though their speech/ Was broken words, they *thought* a language there,—/ And all the burning tongues the Passions teach/ Found in one sigh the best interpreter…" (II, clxxxix). Next, there is a kind of practicum as the affair moves from the concealment of the caves on the beach to the society of Haidée's father's house, where, thinking her father dead, she has adopted the mantle of queen of the island. The final lesson is in impermanence, as life's caprice, through the instrument of Haidée's father, strikes down first Juan and then Haidée.

By the end of Juan's time on the island, he has been stripped of the preconceptions of class, nation, and language, but his perspective still remains firmly

male. Haidée's death manifests the underlying gender bias that underpins much of Don Juan, as well as the other nineteenth-century reinventions discussed in this argument: a woman may be a pedagogue, a tool for pedagogy, or even a subject of study, but she does not, cannot, undertake the libertine journey herself because she is intrinsically unchangeable. She is the star to wander by, not the wanderer.[27] Once no longer relevant to the libertine's direction, a woman removes herself or is removed. Donna Julia's last letter, the one that gets eaten, is quite explicit on this point: "Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,/ 'T is a Woman's whole existence; Man may range/ The Court, Camp, Church, the Vessel, and the Mart…" (I, cxciv). It is for Juan to journey; it is for his women to disappear. Julia removes herself by taking the veil; Haidée is removed by death. In this way the women of *Don Juan* remain discrete and equal experiences, the Other that serves as catalyst to the hero's development, but remains, in the substance of their experience, unknowable—until the seraglio scene, when the libertine is abducted, threatened, and forced to act the part of the woman. Byron's treatment of the experience is much more extensive than the toying with transvestitism that we will see in Beardsley's treatment of the Tannhäuser myth or the vague homosocial/homosexual undertones in Swinburne's. Juan's first-person experience of the physical and social subjugation of the harem—from the disempowered end—communicates a real sense of threat, a disempowerment that Byron himself may have known intimately; as Marchand notes in the preface to Don Juan, Byron "felt himself the most pursued of men" (xi). In a story that goes to great lengths to strip away the contrived signifiers that empower the libertine, signifiers that might be seen to differentiate the essence of one man's experience from another's (class, nation, language), the harem scene does the

unthinkable, attacking the one seemingly immutable divide in human experience, that of gender itself.

The Cuckoo in the Harem

Having been schooled in the theory of seduction by a woman with moral pretensions and the practice by a woman without, the next logical step in Juan's development is the opportunity to apply the seductive skills he has learned under controlled circumstances; from this, he develops a foundation for and tendency to sympathy. To do so, not from the powerful, defined position of the traditional libertine, but from the disempowered, undefined position of a slave, victim, and simulated female, develops in him the kind of intimate understanding no libertine has ever before had of the female condition, the kind you get inside the skin rather than inside the vagina. The harem episode of Cantos V and VI, in which Juan seduces, or so the imagery suggests, Dudù in the seraglio of the sultan, accords Juan the agency to seduce for the first time as a traditional libertine, the power behind the seduction, but those controlled circumstances also force him to experience sexual attention in conditions of subjugation, passivity, and threat as the object of forced attentions—i.e., *as* a woman, in a stereotypical woman's role at the bottom of the male/female power dynamic. Andrew Stauffer's analysis of the content of the Juan/Dudù scene in the course of tracing its origins in the medieval romance of *Floire and Blancheflor* concludes that the appropriation of the medieval love story permits the Dudù seduction to remain innocent in spite of its sexual content. Innocence in experience is certainly a theme Byron traffics in, as it is the foundation of the Haidée episode, so it is reasonable to expect it to carry over here, but Stauffer makes a critical assumption in delineating the parallels between Juan and Floire that turns out to

be incorrect, yet telling. Stauffer writes: “In the sixth canto of Byron’s poem, Juan gains access to a Turkish seraglio by disguising himself as a woman” (85). In electing to array himself in feminizing attire, Juan is thought to parallel Floire who, in this version, hides himself away in a basket of flowers in order to rescue a beloved. Unfortunately Juan is on no such mission, and lacks even the pretense of self-determination. He is simply, and repeatedly, the victim of circumstance. As with the knowledge-sapping early education and the language-impairing shipwreck, his sale in the slave markets of Constantinople once again empties him of critical signifiers through a sequence of diminutions by which Juan is stripped of the little identity that birth and heritage have accorded him. His sale as a slave to the Turkish sultanate, for instance, renders his nobility, family, and country irrelevant constructs. The conversion of his name from Don Juan to plain Juanna demotes him twice, divesting him of title and diminishing him by emasculation. Likewise, the act of circumcision, an honor proffered by the “third-gendered” slave master Baba, whose sexual ambiguity and African origins suggest that he/she is likely ignorant of the true magnitude of the loss to be sustained, would render Juan no longer recognizable as a Christian. Juan’s rejection of this distinction appears to be precipitated less by fears of the appearance of religious infidelity, however, than physical harm, because his protests are couched in terms of fatality: “Strike me dead,/ But they as soon shall circumcise my head!/ Cut off a thousand heads, before-” (V, lxxi-lxxii). This metaphor elides the difference between the loss of the foreskin and the loss of the penis, and equates castration with decapitation and the kind of mass slaughter that foreshadows the later Russian assault on the city. The terms are even the same—Canto VIII describes the taking of Ismail in curiously sexual language: “The town was entered: first one column

made/ Its sanguinary way good—then another;/ The reeking bayonet and the flashing blade/ Clashed 'gainst the scimitar…" (VIII, lxix). In contrast to the actual facts of the battle, Byron's account has the town passively receiving the assault; the Russians attack not in waves but in invading columns, a formation whose phallic implications are evident when "sanguinary way" is read as both a description of the progress and the characteristics of the passage. The only full-sized weapon clearly identified in this stanza is the Arab scimitar; Russians forces are credited with use of the indefinite "blade," a term as easily applicable to scalpel as to sword. The result of this incursion? The lamentation of women and children, results just as characteristic of rape as invasion. Circumcision can thus be seen as a violent assault on the barriers of the self, differing from the rape of a woman or the invasion of a fortified town like Ismail only by factors of scale; Juan's sympathy for the plight of Ismail later, the Childe-Harolde-like *weltschmerz* (world-pain) that induces him to adopt a refugee child, is thus a natural outgrowth of having to suffer the threat of similar assault here.[28]

Though Juan is never actually circumcised—he is dressed as a woman and delivered to the sultan's wife, Gulbeyaz, intact—the threat of discovery, castration, or death hangs over his head for the entire episode. These tragic outcomes can only be avoided by successful impersonation of a woman, and so Juan's manner and appearance are feminized through cross-dressing and depilation. The perfection of his transformation notwithstanding, it is undoubtedly an incredibly alienating experience for Juan to mimic a woman's form, to feel the unfamiliar weight of dragging skirts and dressed hair, the smart of freshly-tweezed flesh, and the occluding thickness of makeup; Susan Wolfson argues that such an occurrence has the power to undermine Juan's masculinity, and that does

seem to be the intent, if not the result, of the effort. It is certainly an unusual experience for the libertine; as his first practical experience occupying the shell of a woman, rather than just particular orifices of her body, it is a lesson in being, rather than possessing, the Other.

Feminine attire requires submissive behavior, lest the masquerade be found out, so Juan is also instructed in comportment:

> 'If you could just contrive,' he said, 'to stint
> That somewhat manly majesty of stride…
> To swing a little less from side to side,
> Which has at times an aspect of the oddest;—
> And also could you look a little modest,' (V, xci)

Juan is further diminished by being required to limit his actions as befits a submissive individual—to shorten his stride, to reduce his requirements for space, and to moderate his emotional expressiveness—as a precursor to meeting Gulbeyaz and undertaking the submissive role in that relationship—so he is othered for a second time, as a subjugated entity curtailed in matters of expression and movement, the slave in a master-slave dialectic.

It may be useful at this point to note that such enforced relinquishment of power is not a trope typical to *Floire et Blancheflor* or any other traditional hiding-in-the-harem tale, where the masquerade is undertaken as a ruse by which the protagonist gains access to, and undermines, Oriental and female secrets. Though Eric Meyer is inclined to read this episode as a particularly twisty imperialist subversion, where "Juan's feminization…provides Byron with a motive for penetrating the veil of the Oriental phantasm, thus allowing him to get inside the alien culture in order to colonize it from within…" (687), the fact remains that Juan is not the agent here, he is the compelled

party. He is sold into this situation. Feminized or not, as an acquired object he occupies the lowest rung of the harem hierarchy. This is why even Baba, the third-sexed, is allowed, in proxy for his mistress, to threaten and command the Westerner. In this episode, the Oriental female has so much power over the Occidental male she can deprive him even of his masculinity, and the masquerade is a means of undermining the existing power structures for her own satisfaction. The Gulbeyaz liaison is thus simultaneously a paradigm of revolution, as the sultana thwarts the male hegemony of her own culture, and of reverse colonialism, as the European is subordinated to the demands of an Eastern race and a female gender, and thus quite an important moment for Oriental female equality.[29] It is a wonder, then, that Juan escapes with his head after he refuses Gulbeyaz's sexual advances; in fact, decapitation is only the first of the Sultana's impulses, chronicled in a long list of possibilities including, in order, castration, aspersions on his upbringing, persuasion, sulking, suicide, punishment of an underling, and finally tears (V, cxxxix). According to Meyer, it is "[o]nly when both the sensual lures of the East as well as its more aggressively threatening features have been brought under the regulation of the economy of discourse can the Western mind rise triumphant over the Oriental will" (690). Unfortunately, the Western mind as featured in a man like Juan is no stalwart thing, for it is to this last, most feminine, and least imperious emotional reaction that Juan caves. It shows he is taking the lessons of his feminine experience to heart; he responds sympathetically to displays of emotion in ways he would not to displays of overt dominance.

The sultan's interruption of the Gulbeyaz affair rounds out Juan's indoctrination in othered existence by adding the specter of deviance to the episode. Peter Graham

emphasizes the pantomime hilarity and transvestite possibilities of the episode, first in the interaction between the dominant Gulbeyaz and a Juan in women's wear, and then with the Sultan, who is "a stage Ottoman of the first order…he could easily be played by a woman as a man; and his stagily masculine appearance enhances the canto's air of androgyny," suggesting the theatricality calls into question the fixity of "all externally imposed or superficially delineated identities" (86). The poem credits the Sultan with total control of his household, indicating that "Four wives and twice five hundred maids, unseen,/ Were ruled as calmly as a Christian queen" (V, cxlviii). These vast numbers of lovers, as well as the fifty daughters and forty-eight sons, seems to indicate that the sultan is a bastion of heterosexual male potency, especially since that number increases by a full third in Canto VI. However, the very next stanza introduces the notion of undefined scandal:

> If now and then there happened a slight slip,
> Little was heard of criminal or crime;
> The story scarcely passed a single lip—
> The sack and sea had settled all in time,
> From which the secret nobody could rip:
> The public knew no more than does this rhyme;
> No scandals made the daily press a curse—
> Morals were better, and the fish no worse. (V, cxlix)

The punishment referred to here—being sewn into a sack and thrown into the sea—is a common response to infidelity, and one risked twice over by Juan, first for his involvement with the sultana, and then for his interference with Dudù. Curiously, the stanza uses a passive syntactic construction to refer to potential scandals punishable by drowning, intentionally obfuscating the agent of the infidelity. Based on what is claimed of the sultan's omnipotence, it would be logical to assume that the scandal refers to adultery committed by a wife or concubine with another individual. But why the

emphasis on secrecy? Because a secret kept from the reader acts as a gap, creating the space for visualization of the vice which most speaks to the individual—whether it is mere fornication or something more transgressive.

For example, the sultan's reaction to Juan as Juanna suggests that the concealed crime might well be one of homosexual desire. Though his powers of sight are much emphasized, his observations are often rationalized in self-centered terms: "He saw with his own eyes the moon was round,/ Was also certain that the earth was square,/ Because he had journeyed fifty miles, and found/ No sign that it was circular anywhere…"(V, cl). So when he spies Juan in the company of the damsels and eunuchs, it is not clear whether "perceived/ Juan amongst the damsels in disguise,/ At which he seemed no whit surprised or grieved…" (V, clv) is meant to indicate that he perceives the apparently-female Juan, and finds "her" pretty, or that he perceives the disguise and finds Juan pretty. Either way, his self-interest would have him publicly abet the masquerade. The rhymed pairing of "disguise" and "no whit surprised" in the stanza seems to emphasize the possibility that Juan's true sex is evident to the sultan—it is the disguise, rather than the beauty, about which he is not surprised—which underpins the compliment to Juan's face with the threat of an implicit forced homosexual encounter. Such an undertone would justify Juan's response, which is to "blush and shake," and also explain the poem's reference to him as a "new-bought virgin" when the reader well knows he is not (V, clvi). The poem conspires to maintain the silence surrounding such a "slight slip," if one happens; apart from the ambiguity of the adjectives in the statement "…as a man/ He liked to have a handsome paramour/ At hand, as one may like to have a fan" (VI, xci), no more is said of the matter. Still, the space for homosexual experience is opened by the very fact of the

sultan's open appreciation; this is the potential that Charles Donelan refers to when he speaks of Juan's "polysexuality" in the harem scenes (95).

In her analysis of harem stories in opera, Ruth Bernard Yeazell defines the underlying anxiety of such tales as "not only a general concern about the problem of knowing other people but a peculiarly masculine anxiety about the erotic secrets of women." Libertine stories seeking to address and salve that anxiety are not new. Crébillon's *The Sofa*, for instance, a popular Orientalist piece, attempts to divine the feminine mysteries by concealing a narrating sentience within a piece of furniture commonly used for harem assignations; Denis Diderot's *Indiscreet Jewels* takes a more direct approach, imagining a magic ring that invests female genitalia with the power of speech. Neither solution is entirely effective because meaning is always modulated by the narrative—the sofa is privy to events, true, but must judge motivations based on what it understands; in giving voice to organs previously mute, the ring also opens the door to personality and rhetoric, creating multiplicity and conflict, but no real persuasion or truth. Byron's harem scene seems to tackle the problem of understanding feminine experience with more success precisely because it does not bother to express its findings. It models a method for obtaining access to a woman's experience, and thus her secrets, by stripping the libertine of his masculine ego and then forcing him first into a woman's dress, then into her behavior, and finally into her intimate relations. That it forbears in the end to narrate a revelation validates the understanding the reader should have gained; to narrate Juan's discoveries, particularly through the mouthpiece of the poem's world-weary and unequivocally male speaker/poet, would be to deform them. This restraint is the second

indication that sympathy and understanding together constitute the terminus of Juan's development, not mere sexual prowess.

The Harrowing of London

The exile from Spain remakes Juan, emptying him of all predetermined qualities and filling him with new traits built from experience with the theory of desire, the practice of sex, and the emotional ramifications of power and subjugation. Juan is now an enticing prospect, and England is destined to be the proving ground that shows just what kind of seducer this exile has turned out, and what kind of ramifications the acquisition of that knowledge will have. If Byron's seduction of the reader, so excessive in its strategies of disarmament and personalization, can be said to undertake strategies of control at all, that manipulation happens here, in the English cantos, through the attenuation of expectation. Back in Canto I, the speaker-poet explicitly directs the reader to expect Hell at this stage of the narrative. In the Don Juan tradition, some form of supernatural retribution always occurs just before the descent into Hell; the libertine's sins are revealed and he is submitted to a higher power for judgment and condemnation. The last act of *El Burlador*, for instance, condemns de Molina's Don Juan for arrogance, short-sightedness, and general stupidity. In a moment of hubris, Don Juan invites the statue of his victim Don Gonzalo to dinner. Politely, the statue turns up to proffer a return invitation; the ensuing meal, before which Juan neglects to seek absolution, offers a foretaste of Hell's punishments in a menu of vipers and scorpions washed down by gall and vinegar. Juan is dragged below-stage to Hell, undoubtedly to be punished for adultery and general forgetfulness. Molière's version of the dinner scene instead makes a point of John's cold-blooded rejection of salvation—not content just to forget to seek

repentance, Don John actively feigns conversion in order to manipulate his father and insult Don Carlos, claiming that his betrayal of Donna Elvira was necessitated by his new-found faith (V, iii). John is warned to seek Heaven's mercy twice, first by Sganarelle and then by a spectral woman, but after he clarifies his position on repentance by dispatching the spirit with his sword, the statue speaks, and the play ends on a nice moment of thunder, lightning, and spectacle where John falls into the earth and is consumed by flames. In either version, the audience gets to go home happily alight with the joy of *schadenfreude* and with their pious faith in eternal judgment validated.

In Byron's version, however, the reader is allowed to depend on no such faith. The seduction has entered the control phase, and the narrative appears to uphold a set of beliefs held by the reader—that divine judgment is both possible and, in this story, inevitable—only to take them away by spinning out the moments leading up to climax, the same way a seducer might engineer the expectation of love with promises of a wedding, only to continually put off the date. Seemingly in accordance with the speaker-poet's claim to morality made in Canto I ("If any person should presume to assert/ This story is not moral…/ That this is not a moral tale, though gay…I mean to show/ The very place where wicked people go" (I, ccvii)), Byron feeds the reader's expectations with the twin tropes of dinner and ghost.[30] A reader with any experience at all of the moral sermon delivered by the story's progenitor narratives—and it is useful to recall that Haslett's first chapter demonstrates that *everyone* in England has experience with this story at this time—assumes Hell is inevitable, and would expect, at the beginning of the poem, to have Canto XII put a period to the protagonist, likely with the aid of demons and spectacle. But Byron then starves the reader of that inevitable retribution—because

readers who have memorized the face of Haidée and quailed at the prospect of emasculation along with Juan should no longer rely unthinkingly on paternalistic oversight, supernatural or otherwise, and inescapable heavenly justice. The received morality of the nineteenth century, politically derived and externally imposed and enforced, is shown to have no legs. The only functional morality is a practical one, derived from an experience of immorality, built on sympathy, and tailored to the particular conditions of the moment—conditions that, as Byron's Don Juan well knows, can change in an instant. A reader that has travelled with Juan through shipwreck, pirates, harems, and the like realizes that there is no such thing as inevitability in this narrative, or this world. This change results from the broadening influence of travel generally, and the particular caprices of this journey particularly, vicariously upon the mind. In contemplating travel as one of the predominant themes in *Don Juan*, Boyd emphasizes this effect:

> To the educative influences of contact with rude nature and personal experience of distance and physical hardship, Byron adds firsthand acquaintance with a wide variety of peoples, places, and manners… Travel in Don Juan serves a double purpose. It fosters and chastises the hero, educating him as no mother or book learning in Seville could do; and it educates the reader, by juxtaposing view after view of the modern real world. (73)

That Canto XII turns out to be the London society canto instead speaks volumes about both the unreliability of the speaker-poet and Byron's own derision for the city from which he remained exiled. The change can also be interpreted either as the relocation of the judgment scene to a less efficacious courtroom, or the deflection of what might otherwise be seen as Juan's headlong rush—through exile, shipwreck, enslavement, and war—to inevitable destruction. *Don Juan* inverts the sequence of damnation, and

multiplies the mystical encounters in a way that thwarts the condemnatory potential of the ending.

This is not to say that the journey has left the hero unscarred; he has lost some of that innocence that characterizes the first six cantos. After his time on the battlefield and in the Russian court, he is said to be "[a] little *blasé*—'t is not to be wondered/ At, that his heart had got a tougher rind:/ And though not vainer from his past success,/ No doubt his sensibilities were less" (XII, lxxxi). According to the poet, this is due in part to the peculiarities of British women, whose virtue is a product, apparently, of the intersection of a reserved manner and society's surveillance (XII, lxxiv-lxxxi); however, the adoption of the orphan of war suggests that, however toughened, Juan's sensibilities have altered, rather than diminished. The reader being told that Juan "was more glad in her/ Safety, than his new order of St. Vladimir" (VIII, cxl) suggests that his heroism in the orphan's rescue is motivated by something other than vanity or reward; likewise, the next stanza's "—and Juan wept,/ And made a vow to shield her, which he kept" (VIII, cxli) implies the development of a very un-libertine emotional connection with the child, in spite of the fact that taking on a female ward is an event fraught with licentious possibilities in an ostensibly libertine tale. (That Juan lodges the child with a tutor as soon as she obtains school age is perhaps telling in this regard.) The structure of this line is interesting, as well, because of its Biblical resonances: the clause isolated between the em-dash and the end of the line echoes John 11:35 in the King James translation, which reads "Jesus wept." Famous for being the shortest verse in the Bible, this line also marks a moment when, in a gospel whose narrative is about Christ's transcendence, his humanity shows through. Even though his divinity gives him the power to resurrect Lazarus, a miracle

manifested in subsequent verses, Christ first cries in empathy with Mary's grief. A reader familiar with the biblical context would recognize that, perhaps because of his early adventures, this version of Don Juan poised on the precipice of judgment is meant to be a radically different character than those monolithic versions which, incapable of repentance, challenged the statue and lost; he may, in fact, be judged and yet escape. For this reader it is fortunate, then, that the story remains unfinished, for the speaker promises, but again does not deliver, "a huge monument of pathos/ As Philip's son proposed to do with Athos" (XII, lxxxvi), a metaphor that suggests future immutability by comparing Juan to the statue of Alexander proposed for, but never built on, Mount Athos. To deliver such a metaphor is to fix Juan, once again, within the signifiers that would have defined him (class, nation, language, gender) had his exile not happened; to promise such an event but not deliver is to string the reader along in a endless quest for certainty and resolution (the kind of result many expect from religion), punishment or escape, even though the narrative, like the world it tries to emulate, is only about change.

It is while musing on change—and mistresses—that Juan encounters the poem's version of the stone guest, an apparently evanescent manifestation known as the Black Friar. Juan meets the Black Friar a total of twice, a number that echoes the original Juan's encounters with the stone guest. Juan dines three times between these mysterious encounters—a dinner with an extensive menu before the first encounter, a breakfast and dinner between the encounters, and a breakfast after the second encounter that reveals the specter to be the Duchess Fitz-Fulke. The first dinner is described in terms of conflict that echo the *braggadocio* of the original challenge in de Molina—we are told there are "massy plates for armour, knives and forks/ for weapons…"—but nothing supernatural,

as here "more mystery lurks… [in the food]/ Than witches, b—ches, or physicians brew" (XV, lxii). The context of the meal has changed since *El Burlador*. Byron's world is a new world where the supernatural commands significantly less attention than the menu, even to the speaker who is crafting the tale; he gives eleven stanzas to the contemplation of the bill of fare for this dinner, and only six to the subsequent haunting. Even when contemplating his own methods, the speaker-poet cannot help but take recourse to images of consumption:

> But Politics, and Policy, and Piety,
> Are topics that I sometimes introduce,
> Not only for the sake of their variety,
> But as subservient to their moral use;
> Because my business is to *dress* society
> And stuff with *sage* that very verdant goose.
> And now, that we may furnish with some matter all
> Tastes, we are going to try the Supernatural. (XV, xciii)

Every philosophical construct in life, thanks to the speaker's metaphor, is shown to be sublimated to the appetites; cater to the appetites, the reasoning goes, and wisdom—*sagesse*—may be implanted in society like sage-and-onions in the entree. The supernatural is to be used in this narrative, not because it has metaphysical power or validity, but to round out the selection on the plate. As Helen Gardner notes, "he displays with great force the satiety which dogs, as its appropriate nemesis, the life of sensation. He offers no panaceas and does not pretend that men can be saved from themselves by love…by politics, or by patriotism…[only] a positive devotion to the truth" (119-20). Rationalism trumps metaphysics, then, by offering an antidote to the jaded palate, a digestive to a stomach bloated on faith and philosophy, a tiny dose of the emptiness that, in Juan, was a necessity for change.

After such a meal, it might be reasonable to suspect that the Black Friar, like Marley's ghost, is merely a manifestation of prodigious indigestion, but the next meal reveals him to have a proper, if immaterial, history. The monk is a relic of the suppression of the monasteries under Henry VIII, a spirit haunting the family of the man who dispossessed him. His story clearly marks him as an outmoded construct, a relic of past beliefs that, though the speaker does much to defend them as "the source of the Sublime and Mysterious" (XV, xcv), has no actual effect—he stands by the cradles and the coffins of the Amundeville family, but exacts no revenge. Even its method of delivery marks his irrelevance to the modern world; his story, told over breakfast, is used as a vehicle by which Adeline may show off her singer-songwriter capabilities. Though Juan is distraught, he is not at risk, because as an instrument of threat and repentance the Friar, like the religion he represents, is clearly impotent as well as incorporeal.

The fact of the spectre's existence is less clear. During the second manifestation, Juan discovers that the Friar exhibits a remarkable solidity of bustline and two rows of pearls, and then finds the ghost to be the Duchess Fitz-Fulke, a revelation which throws the metaphysical origins of the first encounter into some dispute. Anthony England points out that this encounter is phrased in "language of ascent and progression," which indicates "an impressive advance in [Juan's] capacity to pursue a salutary demystification of his world" (1415)—in effect, Juan's intellect has matured notably in the space of a single day. This contradicts Rutherford's criticism of Juan's behavior as immature: "Juan passes from sublime musings about Aurora to an involvement with the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke, and this is perfectly in keeping with Byron's view of human nature—Juan's inconsistency, his inability to resist temptation, is another case of the inadequacy of

man's state to his conceptions" (203). However, the speaker's eleventh-canto exhortation that Juan "be/ Not what you *seem*, but always what you *see*…" (XI, lxxxvi) lends weight to the notion that perspicacity, not consistency, is the relevant feature of development under consideration—the will to self-determination is key, even if the results of that self-determination are less than laudable. The agent of supernatural retribution becomes another means of revelation; no challenge is issued or accepted; no opportunities of repentance are offered or rejected. The divine justice that puts an end to previous incarnations of Don Juan here has lost its teeth. It is demoted to mundane seduction, another corporeal adventure that will result in further refinement of Juan's self-derived morality, an adventure aptly followed up with images, not of hellfire, but of breakfast, suggesting that this advancement is part of a cycle that can be endlessly perpetuated. The reader's expectations of punishment, if any remain, along with whatever remnants of self-assurance and moral superiority he or she has retained through the events of the narrative, are further undermined by the bathos of that breakfast scene. That which Catherine Addison calls the "cumulative, polygamous, open-ended form" that results from the removal of the judgment scene plays with the reader's desire for certainty and expectation of judgment, rewarding the lengthy effort of identifying with Juan and following him through his exile and development only with space, a floorless, uncertain void that can only be filled with more work, more experience, more development. It is teleology without terminus; the road to damnation has developed a roundabout, the dogma that promises judgment is thwarted, and the God, if there is one, of this world that is so very like the reader's own does not seem to care.

Written from exile, *Don Juan*'s novel manipulation of power, morality, and judgment takes aim at, and finds its target in, the newly bourgeois politics of a reform movement which sought to fortify its position—and stave off the threat of revolution—by openly and consistently curtailing free will under the guise of rejecting the moral excesses of the Regency. The poem very nearly did not get published because of Byron's publisher's early qualms. Caroline Franklin summarizes the political situation, and the editorial reaction, thus: "For expediency… it was necessary these days for all friends of Liberty to castigate the sexual immorality associated both with the Tory court of the Prince Regent and the ossified Whig aristocracy who made a mockery of an Opposition" (131). Byron's editors recommended suppression. Timorousness in the face of phantom charges of sedition, libel, and immorality would have been like a red rag to a bull for such a fire-breathing radical; for Byron, a child reared under the shadow of Scottish Calvinist determinism, a young man ironically heir to money enough to fulfill his most radical philosophical aims and a position in the aristocracy that meant he could not be seen to try, the prospect of exercising true free will—without fear of critique, condemnation, or damnation—must have shimmered, like the Grail, just out of reach for most of his life.[31] In order to get the initial cantos of the poem in print, Byron acceded to the uncharacteristically self-effacing step of anonymous publication, undoubtedly because this poem directly attacks this practice of summarily adopting morality as a summary means of political and social control, rather than a patiently-derived framework, based on experience, for balancing the demands of free will with the needs of one's fellow human. This sequence of departures that the poem takes from the Don Juan tradition seduces the nascent libertine, together with the reader, into a program of

experience whose ultimate result is the refinement of the character and the expansion of the intellect—the development of just such a practical morality. In the Donna Julia episode, Juan is stripped of his education and instructed in the essential human appetites in an environment free of philosophical obfuscation. Against the backdrop of Julia's self-delusion, he learns the truth of himself. In the Haidée encounter, he is stripped of communication and learns, instead, communion—the truth of the beloved. In the Gulbeyaz scenes, he is stripped of sexual identity and experiences, first-hand, the reality of the object—the otherwise incomprehensible truth of the Other. He becomes a new kind of libertine—from this sequence of lessons, he acquires the empathy that he demonstrates toward his ward, shown in his understanding of the dislocation she experiences as a Muslim, an orphan, and a girl; his commitment to her care and protection; and the moderation of his own appetites, which, in any other libertine including Casanova, might make use of her as a kind of lover-in-training. He also acquires true lucidity, as evidenced by the demystification of the stone guest. The new morality Juan is sent to seek is a rational one, and is simultaneously predicated on and antidote to the experience of immorality, so when the poem names Newton "the sole mortal who could grapple/ Since Adam—with a fall—or with an apple" (X, i), it is endorsing a rationalist project of immersion in and analysis of immoral as a method of redressing both the insufficiencies of extant nineteenth-century dogma and of human nature. Should such overt endorsements be insufficiently compelling, the narrative is perfectly willing to seduce, manipulate, and dissemble to help its reader achieve a position of receptivity, and agreement.

CHAPTER 3

ASTRIDE THE WORLDS: BAUDELAIRE AND THE REINVENTED VALMONT

As we have seen, Byron's *Don Juan* deploys all four of the phases of seduction on a grand scale in order to coerce his reader into a perspective that both questions the kind of morality promulgated by British reformers in the new century as a means of consolidating political power and ameliorating revolutionary threat, and values the revelations of self-determination above all received notions regarding power and the signifiers of identity. He disarms by converting a protagonist defined by intent and manipulation into a hero defined by inadvertency and self-discovery; he entices through a prolonged narrative that responds to, and partly fulfills, his reader's changing desires for titillation and revelation; he personalizes by pulling the narrative, which begins in Spain as the tradition dictates, both forward in time and closer to Britain as the adventure continues; and he controls by playing with expectations of judgment, retribution, and escape, promising but not delivering, keeping the reader locked into a relationship with the narrative and its hero in hopes of a resolution that is never delivered. By contrast, Baudelaire's seductive efforts in his analysis of Valmont, "Notes sur *Les Liaisons dangereuses,"* are almost too subtle to identify. These are, after all, merely notes for an argument that was never written, a sketchy set of reminders whose purpose is never made explicit. Save exploiting the connection between Valmont and Laclos, who Baudelaire

considers “a good man,” Baudelaire’s notes do little to disarm; as criticism, rather than fictional narrative, Baudelaire can lean on the authority of his role as critic and the appearance of intellectual objectivity in order to ameliorate the perceived threat of immorality. The notes personalize the argument slightly for the nineteenth-century French reader by utilizing nineteenth-century notions of love as epitomized in the works of Georges Sand as the point of comparison by which to understand—and ultimately valorize—love in the eighteenth-century style. Control never happens at all, perhaps because as a strategy it is more likely to be deployed at the level of syntax and thus would not be apparent in mere notes, or perhaps because, as the work of argument is always to “compass about” (to borrow Kierkegaard’s terms) its reader and direct his or her perspective, control underpins all the choices made in the selection and arrangement of the notes themselves. Baudelaire’s revisions to Valmont instead entice—they are, in many ways, more startling than Byron’s disarming changes to Don Juan—building Valmont up into a right-thinking product of immoral practice, a rational revolutionary. Following Byron, Baudelaire’s argument is poised to present as Valmont a new character based on Laclos’ libertine rather than the libertine Laclos writes, a more alluring version of the aristocrat that will stand head and shoulders above both the eighteenth-century libertine’s peers and the nineteenth-century critic’s contemporaries. These notes are, as notes must be, brief and disconnected, so undoubtedly some of the characteristics of the story that remain unconsidered are so because Baudelaire did not need to make note of them—they were already in his head. Yet there are other omissions that are significant, and telling. When considered in their entirety, the notes seem designed to recast the character as a hero in terms of the poet’s personal mythology of good and evil.[32]

Baudelaire, as we shall see, considers Byron one of the geniuses of the nineteenth century when it comes to recognizing matters of sin and the human heart, so it is perhaps no surprise that he follows Byron in also attempting to mold an eighteenth-century libertine into a rational hero for the new age (largely by exploiting the omissions of history and motivation which are, by necessity given its form, rampant in Laclos' novel), an ideal political model capable of development, self-perfection, and ultimately unparalleled ratiocination. Unlike Byron's Don Juan, however, who must be stripped of his adult autonomy, recreated as a feckless adolescent, and even then still broken through a prolonged and damaging series of diminutions and evacuations before he can become self-aware and self-determining, Baudelaire's Valmont requires only augmentation of those libertine talents so fundamental to successful seduction, a complete understanding of both the self and the victim, to complete his development. The claim that "Notes sur *Les Liaisons dangereuses*" is apparently preparing to defend is that Valmont's divided nature is already heroic; in order to carry out his seductions masterfully, he must have already cultivated the essential skill of self-awareness, a necessary political skill nonexistent, Baudelaire finds, in the new Empire. It requires only the right circumstance, the seduction of the correct victim, to convert that self-awareness into self-knowledge, making Valmont an apt autodidact—both dandy and devil, trainee and trainer—in a curriculum that teaches a concept Baudelaire believes the age has forgotten—that awareness of one's impulse to evil is the critical first step to any sort of redemption at all.

Obscenity and the Curriculum of Vice

Any reader who keeps up with Baudelaire's critical work across his career knows his position on obscenity is complex, ambivalent, and inextricable from considerations of

mechanical reproduction and imaginative genius. In *Salon de 1859*, for instance, Baudelaire derides all photography—including obscene pictures—as a valueless medium mistakenly credited by the public with a truth value superior to art merely because of its unmatched capacity for faithful reproduction. For Baudelaire, the horrors of the imagination are preferable to any such image captured on a plate, particularly to those posed, costumed, possibly pornographic tableaux which appeal to "[l]'amour de l'obscénité, qui est aussi vivace dans le cœur naturel de l'homme que l'amour de soi-même…" and are thus a natural outgrowth of the technology (1034). Yet in the *Salon de 1846*, Baudelaire establishes an equally clear thesis valorizing obscenity when depicted in paint by the likes of Tassaert, Ingres, Watteau, or Delacroix. The same provocative subjects and decadent historical contexts one might find in a photograph are here redeemed for inclusion in Baudelaire's museum of love by the delicate realism of the work. "…[L]e génie sanctifie toutes choses, et si ces sujets étaient traités avec le soin et le recueillement nécessaire, ils ne seraient point souillés par cette obscénité révoltante, qui est plutôt une fanfaronnade qu'une vérité" (901). For Baudelaire, the key to this value is the genius of its creator. Obscenity artificially posed and captured by a machine is valueless; obscenity artificially posed and captured by an artist is brilliance. This obscenity is neither illicit pleasure nor tainting experience, but a means by which subjects could be experienced and understood. Truth is revealed through care and contemplation. The study of those obscene works produced through care and contemplation thus becomes a study, not just of the "how" of vice, the pedagogical curriculum of names and techniques with which the whore's dialogues like the *Satyra Sotadica* are concerned, but of the why—why do it, and, just as significantly, why represent it. In this philosophy of

self-examination, Baudelaire considers that he sits at Byron's feet. In "Réflexions sur quelques-uns de mes contemporains," which went to press in 1860, Baudelaire designs a similar metaphor that fleshes out the intrinsic problem of mankind's sin in the modern age; the issue is not that we do it, but that we delude ourselves about what we do and why it happens. Applying that sanctifying genius to modern writers, Baudelaire identifies Byron as one of those authors whose particular brilliance is in the revelation of the wicked impulses of passion. He writes that they:

> …ont admirablement exprimé la partie blasphématoire de la passion; ils ont projeté des rayons splendides, éblouissants, sur le Lucifer latent qui est installé dans tout cœur humain. Je veux dire que l'art moderne a une tendance essentiellement démoniaque. Et il semble que cette part infernale de l'homme, que l'homme prend plaisir à s'expliquer à lui-même, augmente journellement, comme si le Diable s'amusait à la grossir par des procédés artificiels, à l'instar des engraisseurs, empâtant patiemment le genre humain dans ses basses-cours pour se préparer une nourriture plus succulente. (739-40)

It is this image of man as a farmyard goose, being stuffed with all the delights of sin for a purpose about which he knows nothing, which provides a telling account of Baudelaire's ambivalence about traditional notions of morality which dictate that immorality is best ignored in public, but reveled in in private. He mentions often that the inclination to sin seems to be a natural impulse, like hunger, and there is a suggestion that engorgement upon sin enriches or perhaps sweetens in the manner of the medlar, which must rot before it may be eaten. The act of being stuffed, however, implies a surrender of free will facilitated by stupidity. The bird gorged on food is physically forced to eat; mankind suffers no such physical compulsion to stuff itself on sin (although Baudelaire's inclusion of the Devil suggests there might be a supernatural one). That humanity does gorge may be because it fails to understand the nature of its own reckless impulse to pleasure and satisfaction. Byron's genius, then, and the capability which presumably makes him heir

apparent to the libertines of the *Ancien Régime*, is his ability to uncover the workings of this infernal part, to shed light upon the dark corners in which this "latent Lucifer" operates. The image here is very nearly that of the Platonic philosopher king, except that where philosophers journey out of the cave of the world into the light of understanding, poets like Byron have already achieved that enlightenment and return with it—as "splendid rays"—into the world. Baudelaire may be thinking less here of Byron's libertine characters than of Byron himself; Carrasus notes that Byron wears dandyism with a critical difference: "…Byron lui confère une autre dimension: ennui fatal, lassitude aristocratique, dérision de l'existence, provocation orgiaque, mépris des conventions morales…il communique précisément au dandysme un accent de révolte morale" (158). Boredom, lassitude, and derision characterize Byron's speaker-poet in *Don Juan* far better than it does the juvenile, energetic Juan himself; however, by the end of the tale, both manifest a degree of moral revolt.

If the sins of the fathers are inevitably visited on the sons, then the problems of vice in the industrial age—so admirably illuminated by Byron as a lack of imagination, the incapacity to understand the depths of one's own motivations—must be rooted in the eighteenth century, a topic Baudelaire had long intended to tackle. Baudelaire saved his consideration of Valmont, Laclos' exemplar of the *homme dangereux*, for the end of his career; Claude Pichois dates the notes to 1866, just a few months before the collapse of Baudelaire's health and his retreat into a sanatorium. If this date is correct, then Baudelaire's interest in libertinism, and in this project, is very nearly life-long; it has been twenty years since *Salon de 1846*, when Baudelaire first pinned a Chorier epigraph to an imaginary Tassaert. Likewise, these notes seem to be a logical extension of Baudelaire's

critique of Byron. They undertake a provocative comparison between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, asking: “La fouterie et la gloire de fouterie étaient-elles plus immorale que cette manière modern d’adorer et de mêler le saint au profane?” (640). Baudelaire seems to present eighteenth-century sensuality as a healthier approach to vice than nineteenth-century emotionalism precisely because it is predicated on seduction and the analytical capabilities required to make seduction work, and then fleshes out the bare bones of the Laclos protagonist to make Valmont the archetype of the successful student of the self.

The Eighteenth Century

Because *Dangerous Liaisons* is an epistolary novel, the reader is only allowed to know of any character what the character—or any of his peers—chooses to reveal. We have already seen, in the chapter on seduction, how the gaps in the narrative leave Valmont’s motives open to construction; in the matter of the facts of Valmont’s life, we actually know even less. Like de Molina’s Don Juan, Valmont is conceived and delivered into the story as an adult; his past is delicately hinted at—a previous relationship, of indefinite depth, duration, and seriousness, with Madame de Merteuil in Letter 4, a scandalous and nearly criminal past (without any of the salacious details) in Letter 9, a passing reference to surveillance on a Duchess in Letter 101, an even briefer reference to love “in cold blood” with a Comtesse in Letter 115—but never writ plain. And since nearly every letter in the volume is either a rhetorical construct, motivated by seduction, ingratiation, dominance, or fear, or written by characters that prove, by the end of the story, to be idiots, even such insubstantial hints are suspect. In fact, apart from his title, his ability to pay his valet, and his testamentary relationship with his aunt, Madame de

Rosemonde, Valmont's life has to it no details at all. The story expends most of its expository capital focusing instead on Madame de Merteuil and the elaborate and artful seduction of her that Valmont attempts and bungles. The much-discussed origin story in Letter 81 is her revelation, not his; she successfully juggles a double life, in public a woman of propriety but in private a destructive seducer; her schemes are the more serpentine (manipulating a cohort into deflowering a virgin to exact revenge on that virgin's future husband, as opposed to Valmont's merely seducing a pious woman) and demonstrate a more incisive understanding of the people she manipulates. By comparison, Valmont is a blank slate.

As we will see, Baudelaire's notes marginalize Merteuil's role in the Valmont-Merteuil relationship, choosing instead to inscribe that blank slate that is Valmont with all manner of admirable intellectual qualities like self-analysis and self-comprehension. *Dangerous Liaisons*, it seems, is less a moral text than a revolutionary one in Baudelaire's eyes, and Valmont is very much the best brand of Republican—self-motivated, self-defined, and capable of growth. Though Baudelaire makes the provocative claim that "tous les livres sont immoraux," suggesting that the act of writing might somehow necessitate and presuppose immorality, and the act of reading perhaps communicate it, he states explicitly that this one is meant as a novel of history, one of a genre that "commentent donc et expliquent la Révolution" (640), because after their fashion, Baudelaire claims, the libertines were responsible for that revolt. It is not clear from the notes whether this was because the philosophy of individual agency that permitted libertines to exercise their capricious free will was a useful vehicle for burgeoning notions of democracy, or because the egregious and public excesses of the

libertinage provided evidence of an aristocratic degeneracy which demanded eradication; however, Baudelaire's claim that Valmont's character is a study of the search for power through dandyism lends credibility to the power of libertine individualism, as the dandy is, for Baudelaire, a positive, powerful, and potentially revolutionary figure. [33] The notes even explore Laclos' biography, including his role in the Revolution, at some length, making a point of his participation in the Thermidorean reaction, a move simultaneously revolutionary and reactionary, as if the political philosophies of the author must, by necessity, color and improve the beliefs of the character. The libertines also, in their seductive practice, paved the way for Romanticism: there is some unexplained connection between something Valmont says—no quotation is cited—and the advent of Byron, who Baudelaire believes "était *préparé*, comme Michel-Ange" (640). So if Byron is free to be the philosopher-king of the nineteenth century, it is because a quality in Valmont paved the way.

The enlightened understanding that is supposed to be Byron's signal talent can be found at the core of every aspect of the eighteenth century's sexual philosophy—Valmont's philosophy—that Baudelaire uses as counterpoint to and implied critique of nineteenth-century morays. Unlike "l'extase," a quality of contemporary romantic philosophy the reader is expected to recognize and find familiar, where love induces a transport or a stupor that removes the act entirely from the realm of the functioning intellect, for Baudelaire libertine sex is instead an act designed merely to create or express positive spirits. His shorthand term to characterize the libertine approach is "le délire," which suggests at best only a momentary derangement of the reason—the intellect disordered, reordered, perhaps temporarily altered, as in a febrile hallucination

(641). Delirium passes, either into wellness or death, and, unlike ecstasy with all of its metaphysical connotations of religious transport and divine interference, is a biological manifestation of either illness or chemical interaction. As a biological manifestation, it can be expected to either resolve itself or be cured by the external application of intelligence. Thus Baudelaire's condemnation of the century—and Sand—seems to stem from the accusation that the contemporary lover seeks transcendence in an act that the eighteenth century knew to be transient and ultimately subject to the will and to knowledge. In its essence, sex is trivial act; what is not trivial is the refinement—of intent, of technique, of morality—made possible by its subjection to the intellect. When well-played, sex is the libertine equivalent to Lord Goring's perfect buttonhole—the mark of a socially and intellectually evolved man. When romanticized as the ecstatic gift of a capricious universe, sex invites boredom, disappointment, and passivity. Since ennui and a subtle sense of disappointment are common outgrowths of many adult human experiences besides sex, including meals, birthdays, and some marriages, Baudelaire's argument is based on the kind of universal emotion his reader might be expected to recognize, sympathize with, and believe to be problematic; his seduction is thus personalized, becoming both an intimate discourse about the individual and a larger critique of the age.

Where the nineteenth century (and, by extension, its readers) specializes in self-delusion, in not knowing, the eighteenth century specializes in deluding others, an act which requires complete knowledge of both self and other. Like Valmont, using his lover as a desk upon which to write of his lovelorn state to la Présidente de Tourvel, a specialist in seduction must operate in two registers simultaneously, constantly aware of both his

own desires and the way his lies will be understood. If the specialist is really good, he can manipulate language so that his delusion is never quite a lie, again like Valmont, whose explanation of his exhausted condition in that letter describes his postcoital physical state but can—and is intended to—be read as an emotional one. There is a telling comparison of libertine texts and the works of George Sand at the center of the notes that is made in just these terms: "Le mal se connaissant était moins affreux et plus près de la guérison que le mal s'ignorant" (640). Libertines know their own evil; its exploitation is their art form. George Sand, and by extension the nineteenth century, does not. The critical difference, then, between the sexual philosophies of these two centuries rests in whether—and how—the intellect is deployed. That self-knowledge is key to the value of a character like Valmont, who, in order to perfect his seductions, must both self-analyze (in Baudelaire's language, must perform the work of the dandy), and seek to understand and reconcile the substance of the self his analysis reveals. Baudelaire's reconstruction of Valmont will privilege those gaps in the text when self-knowledge and self-analysis may be "read in," and will utilize Baudelaire's own perverse lexicon of valorization—reliant on figures of dandies and satans—to challenge the reader's preconceptions regarding "good" characters and to build a sympathetic (and thus more enticing, to a reader in the current, more emotional age) hero out of Laclos' fallible protagonist.

The Object: Valmont as Dandy

Of the twenty-one citations Baudelaire selects from the novel for his notes, two-thirds pertain specifically to Valmont. Eleven have to do, not just with his genius for evil, but with his own assessment of the effects of that evil. Valmont does not self-delude in matters of libertine practice. In one quotation, Valmont rejects the Marquise's proposal

regarding the seduction of Cécile on the grounds that it provides far less challenge than the conquest of Tourvel. He remarks elsewhere that it is the difficult experience —as well as the unusual, which is what eventually alters his position on Cécile—that he is driven to pursue. Seduction thus constitutes a regimen of continually advancing study in the acquisition, the manipulation, and the satisfaction of desire. Others are well aware of Valmont's proclivities; Baudelaire makes a point of Madame de Volanges' remark that, all of his life, Valmont has never done anything without a motive, and everything he has done has been dishonest. Yet somehow, Valmont is never challenged about his intentions, and his conquests are never thwarted. Even knowing something of his reputation, Tourvel walks willingly to the slaughter. This is consistent with the libertine capability to disarm, manufacturing a public persona that is milder than the truth their actions would suggest. (Baudelaire ignores the fact that, while Valmont is good at this, Madame de Merteuil is better, maintaining a reputation for prudery even as she seduces and discards Prévan and Danceny in a public milieu.) To do this effectively, the libertine must constantly audit his persona as if it were a work of rhetoric—not just the practical outcomes of his actions, but how they are perceived.

The dandy is the Baudelairean personification of this pursuit of external perfection. As the poet tells his journal, the dandy "droit aspirer à être sublime sans interruption; il doit vivre et dormir devant un miroir" (1273). This construct of the dandy living in front of the mirror may imply a greater degree of passivity than Baudelaire intends; after all, Constantin Guys, Baudelaire's model for dandyism, is known as a boulevardier and praised for his habit of seeking out and getting in among people, and Byron labored energetically (and fatally) for the cause of Greek independence. Modern definitions of

dandyism usually use Baudelaire's conception as their basis, so it may be significant that most of them privilege active, rather than static, contemplation; for instance, the mythological dandy figure Emilien Carassus constructs is defined by demonstration: "Mais si le propre de la vanité est l'autosatisfaction, dépourvue d'inquiétude et stagnant dans la béatitude du confort intellectuel, tel n'est pas assurément le cas du dandy. Il professe un culte de soi actif, exigeant, démonstratif" (45). As such, the libertine in vigorous pursuit of perfection in his seductive appeal and the Brummelian dandy in vigorous pursuit of the perfect cut of coat are more clearly two faces of the same coin. The dandy's particular brand of narcissism provides an unparalleled opportunity for self-study, because the dandy is involved, not in theoretical spheres of pursuit, but in practical ones, the minutiae of the self and its effects. The dandy believes, in Françoise Coblence's terms, "[q]ue la vie soit œuvre, qu'elle soit la seule et la plus grand œuvre" (9); after the revolution in 1848, in part due to Baudelaire's critical views, the scope of that work of life expanded to include politics (243). This postrevolutionary reformist zeal informs Domna Stanton's belligerent definition of the dandy as a member of a "meritocratic minorit[y] engaged in sublimated warfare against unworthy, vulgar, meritless majorities" (7), as well as Richard Pine's subclassification of the herald-dandy as a progenitor of change, "an eponymous hero, who, *by virtue of action related to thought*, makes possible a liberation, a revalorization, of the great gestures and metaphors of the tradition within which he exists" (12).

There is scarcely any better description of Valmont than the dandy living in front of a mirror, because his ongoing correspondence with la Merteuil serves as both mirror and stage. The epistolary format of *Dangerous Liaisons* privileges the experience of the

individual; the reader is forced to occupy only one point of view at a time, and accept all narrative events through the filter of the putative writer's perceptions—a common eighteenth-century strategy for making fiction feel like fact. Because the reader spends so much of Laclos' novel eavesdropping on the conversation between Valmont and Merteuil, these characters become the authoritative voice of events. That feeling of authority is bolstered by the realization that Valmont's careful account of every action implies continual self-vigilance; every letter is an examination of his desires and a post-mortem of his technique. His perpetual rationalization of motives and philosophy permits refinement of his outward personae of libertine, repentant lover, or dutiful nephew, as rhetoric and recipient require.

Baudelaire acknowledges that this emphasis on surfaces complicates the role of the reader, both within the text (the reader to whom each letter is addressed) and outside the text (the reader of the novel itself.) Those of us reading the novel assume we are the audience for the seductive manipulation described at such length; it is those whom the letters address that are their intended victims. However, since all we can know as readers is governed entirely by what the narrative chooses to share, and the narrative of *Dangerous Liaisons* is governed primarily by the Valmont/Merteuil correspondence, the realization that both characters are masters of the undetectable lie suggests that such an assumption is false. While Valmont is busy documenting his proclivity for vice, he is also demonstrating the reader's propensity to be duped.[34] Baudelaire draws attention to this effect in the disclaimer and the preface of the novel, which work at odds to undermine, yet validate, this "truth value" in the text. The preface maintains the illusion that the novel is a compilation of real correspondence drawn from some larger pool, but it

challenges their contents, contending that "nearly all the sentiments expressed are either pretended or dissembled," and thus merely an intellectual novelty. The disclaimer calls the novel a novel, thwarted in its "verisimilitude" by "setting the events… in the present" (Feher 937). If the preface is correct, the contents of the letters are not to be believed, but the events are accurate. If the disclaimer is correct, the events are suspect, never mind the state of the sentiments. So even before the reader gets involved in the layers of prevarication that constitute the libertine existence, the shifting sands of fact and fiction about the text itself must be navigated. Where, and how often, we are allowing ourselves to be seduced into belief is never clear.

Sensitivity is the unexpected anomaly under Valmont's surface, the chink in his libertine armor, and the reason his seduction of Tourvel ultimately fails; Baudelaire nonetheless treats it as an advantage. While seemingly out of character for a normal libertine, someone of, say, Merteuil's stripe, it is invariably part and parcel of a Baudelairean dandy's character. In his encomium on Constantin Guys, "Le Peintre de la vie moderne," Baudelaire remarks in passing that "car le mot dandy implique une quintessence de caractère et une intelligence subtile de tout le mécanisme moral de ce monde ; mais, d'un autre côté, le dandy aspire à l'insensibilité…"(1160). The dandy aspires to insensibility because, at heart, he is too sensitive. Monsieur Guys is not handicapped by this pretense to insensibility; Valmont is. It blinds him to his own circumstances and corrupts his assessment of his effects. As early as Letter 4, Baudelaire's notes show, Valmont acknowledges that falling in love with Tourvel is something from which he must be saved, ostensibly by his own seductive capabilities. Baudelaire underlines the description of the feeling as "*une passion forte*" in his notes

(644). This is a remarkably vulnerable statement for a libertine to make, particularly to an audience as cuttingly effective at criticism as Merteuil; it echoes the dynamic of Baudelaire's definition quite well, however, in that the vulnerability is so quickly parlayed into boast. Valmont shields his sensitivity, suggesting that, for him, in the role he performs, it is a weakness. Merteuil concurs; Valmont has allowed himself to become a victim. Baudelaire, however, appears to treat this feeling as a strength, a testament to the epic scale of Valmont's desires, as well as the extraordinary mastery of his reason, to which those passions submit.

Tactics, rules, and methods—the tools of this reason—turn out to be insufficient against such a passion, because, in the novel, Valmont does appear to fall in love, and the circumstance ultimately invites his death. The weakness Valmont confesses by Letter 21—"Mes yeux sont mouillés de larmes… J'ai été étonné du plaisir qu'on éprouve en faisant le bien…"—could be taken merely as evidence of circumstantial generosity and sarcasm thickly applied. After all, Baudelaire remarks early in the notes that "…Valmont est surtout un vaniteux. Il est d'ailleurs généreux, toutes les fois qu'il ne s'agit pas des femmes et de sa gloire," a declaration which fails to acknowledge the obvious point that, for Valmont, women and glory are synonymous and pervasive (639). However, given the circumstances—and in spite of the fact that this moment is part of a larger strategy involving the story of a seduction told to seduce—it could also be read as a product of the softening effect of his relationship with Tourvel. Baudelaire chooses to take it as direct evidence of some latent compassion, "un reste de sensibilité par quoi il est inférieur à la Merteuil, chez qui tout ce qui est humaine est calciné" (645). Though Merteuil is unquestionably the better libertine, and Baudelaire acknowledges her achievement

openly, that metaphor of ashes is telling. It reinforces the idea that Valmont, the ideal libertine, is neither static, not fixed; he is capable of some kind of emotional development. Of recovery, to invoke again the language applied to the kind of evil that is self-aware. Madame de Merteuil is not; her humanity has been burnt out. She is a shell of a human. It is her external disfigurement by smallpox that serves as the retributive moment in Baudelaire's consideration, not Valmont's death—perhaps because the notes were incomplete, or perhaps because although a human has a content, an interiority, that may be snuffed out, a shell may only be damaged on its outside—thus Merteuil's punishment reveals her true nature.[35]

Baudelaire goes so far as to call Merteuil depraved, a word he never applies to Valmont: his comment on Letter 81, the much-discussed moment where the lady details her program of libertine self-fashioning, is limited to a missish sort of pique. Madame de Merteuil is too much the man for his taste, as "[l]a femme qui veut toujours faire l'homme, signe de grand dépravation" (646). One has the sense that contravening gender roles in this fashion, wanting to do as the man does, denotes a particularly excessive brand of excess, meriting a lower circle of Hell even than that to which most libertines aspire.[36] Then again, Baudelaire is not inclined to sugar-coat that which he considers the criminal nature of women, though he does find it to have, in the end, an ameliorative effect on the man. In his maxims on love, he lays out the evolution this way: "Et c'est ainsi, grâce à une vue plus synthétique des choses, que l'admiration [pour votre maitresse] vous ramènera tout naturellement vers l'amour pur, ce soleil dont l'intensité absorbe toutes les taches" (475). Ultimately, then, the effect of any male/female

relationship is the distancing of the one from the other, the introduction of light into the dark corners, and the refinement of the male nature.

Though refinement is the outcome, the desires are rather different. The impulse of the lover is to lose himself in the beloved and yet still maintain a discrete identity: "L'amour veut sortir de soi, se confondre avec sa victime, comme la vainqueur avec le vaincu, et cependant conserver des privilèges de conquérant …" (1247). This impulse explains the very un-libertine empathy that creeps into Valmont's approach to the seduction of Tourvel; it also explains the ease with which Merteuil manipulates Valmont into destroying his beloved. As a peer and a libertine, Merteuil is the only audience that matters in the novel, and she does not permit Valmont to maintain the pretense of conquest. Baudelaire is very clear about placing blame. "Valmont est dupe," we are told; even though it is Valmont's sensitivity and vanity together that permit him to be manipulated, it is Merteuil whom Baudelaire credits with the murder of Tourvel, and by implication also the estrangement between the libertines which precipitates the tragedy of Valmont's death (642). Baudelaire's survey of the text ends well before the point in the novel where the estrangement escalates, so Valmont's complicity in the tragedy is elided, perhaps intentionally. It is, after all, easier to accept Valmont as a rational hero if one ignores his vain and self-destructive love of power, the propensity for one-upmanship that controls him, and his inability to let go the compulsion to have the last word. Or that he does whatever Merteuil tells him to.

In his efforts to catalogue Valmont's finer points, Baudelaire sidesteps many of those moments in the plot when Valmont is most active in deploying the duplicities of seduction. Baudelaire does not quote from the letter detailing Valmont's scheme to

blackmail Cécile, even though it is an extraordinary example of a victim's impropriety being turned against her— through the promise of illicit communications from her lover, Cécile is duped into providing the key to her own room to her seducer. Baudelaire does not quote from her education in vice, even though pedagogical exchange, where the acolyte is introduced to immorality through the naming of the parts, is a trope of libertine fiction. He does not quote from the letter that Valmont writes to Tourvel using his lover's sated body as a lap desk, even though it is an exquisite manipulation of irony and shows extraordinary command of the language. He also does not quote from the letter with which Valmont crushes that pious lady, the moment that solidifies Valmont's identity as a libertine conqueror—because it is not a true seduction, by eighteenth-century standards of the home dangereux, until the seduction is revealed and the victim is publicly humiliated. Though these are some of the most memorable moments of the novel, moments when Laclos shows just how competent Valmont is with the tactics and methods of libertine seduction, they lack the inward narcissism, the relentless self-exploration, of the moments that Baudelaire select instead. In these contemplative moments, Valmont is the goose comprehending his engorgement; in the seductive ones, he is the diabolic fattener.

The Agent: Valmont as Satan

The capability for self-analysis characteristic of the dandy thus provides Valmont with the intellectual mechanism to evaluate and improve outward manifestations, the rhetoric of the self; it does not, however, give him the imagination to acknowledge and comprehend the substance of the self—the contradictory drives, desires, and impulses that battle for dominance and expression as free will. In Baudelaire's symbolism, this is

the identifying characteristic of the devil—Satan is, after all, the manifestation of schism in God's creation—and is thus the basis for Baudelaire's repeated connection of Valmont and Satan throughout the notes. Baudelaire begins by characterizing Valmont merely as satanic, i.e., having qualities similar to those of Satan, but in the midst of analysis of Valmont's impiety, the poet begins to equate Valmont so closely with the Devil that the man begins to function as a substitute for the demon; Valmont comes to stand in for God's opposite number. Laclos' treatment of Valmont's impiety certainly smacks of a confrontational attitude toward God; it is difficult to tell whether, in the original story, this impiety is born of true belief or merely the willingness to manipulate the affectations of belief in others (in other words, is it Valmont being a devil, truly committed to his own disbelief, or Valmont behaving as a dandy, modulating the appearance of irreverence for desired effect). Baudelaire cites two instances of Valmont's impiety in the notes. In one, Valmont vows to force his conquest to sacrifice her own virtue, simultaneously robbing both her husband and her god of a faithful adherent. In a second, he engineers a moment of generosity, in order that his conquest may hear of it and think him reformed, and then asks those to whom he was generous to pray to God on his behalf. In both cases, it is impossible to separate libertine conviction from audience reception; in Baudelaire's analysis, however, God is a real and present concern, for it is against God that Valmont's extraordinary prowess is ultimately to be pitched.

Satanism is a recurrent theme in Baudelaire's work; at one point in his journal, he raises the question: "Se livrer à Satan, qu'est-ce que c'est?" (1260). Evidently, it is the opportunity to understand human impulse. For Baudelaire, modern man is inherently divided: "Il y'a dans tout homme, à toute heure, deux postulations simultanées l'une vers

Dieu, l'autre vers Satan" (1277). To make these allegiances correspond exactly to the duality between reason and nature is to miss the lesson of the satanic Valmont, in whom reason is the tool by which the nature is first understood and assimilated, before being controlled and perfected. Indeed, Baudelaire's theology suggests that the duality of man, though the current condition, is by no means ideal. "La théologie. Qu'est-ce que la chute? Si c'est l'unité devenue dualité, c'est Dieu qui a chuté. En d'autres termes, la création ne serait-elle pas la chute de Dieu?" (1283). In this view, God was originally an entity, whole and complete. As each of his creations—first Lucifer, then man—falls, that unity fragments, and thus God is diminished. The seed of the fragmentation of God manifests in Satan as pride; in man, it shows as original sin, the vice man inherits rather than the one he makes for himself. The most narcissistic of the seven deadly sins, pride requires detailed knowledge of one's own capabilities, so Satan, Valmont, and Baudelaire's dandy are all similarly aligned in their capacity for self-examination.[37] Once the acceptance of original sin as doctrine, however, provides a pat explanation for the source of sinful tendencies, Satan loses substance, becoming "an elegant shorthand for the sum of human passions and weaknesses" (Dendle 22). He becomes that latent Lucifer whose effects Byron—philosophical heir to Valmont—is so good at revealing through extended examinations of the effects of seduction like *Don Juan*. Both Byron's version of Don Juan and Baudelaire's version of Valmont arrive at the same conclusion regarded truth and received morality, which Baudelaire proposes in his journal as a "[t]heorie de la vraie civilisation" contingent on such revelation: "Elle n'est pas dans le gaz, ni dans la vapeur, ni dans les tables tournantes, elle est dans la diminution des traces du péché originel" (1291). Baudelaire's true civilization, it appears, is found, not in technological progress

or moral perfection, but in addressing the gaps in human knowledge—the substitution of actual understanding for original sin. Fill the gaps adequately, and suddenly the potential exists to address the problem of the Fall. Valmont's project of self-awareness, it seems, may be the path back to divine unity.[38]

Where moralists would see the rejection of sin, original or otherwise, as the path to grace, Baudelaire seems to be arguing for the integration of it into the human experience. This is handled explicitly in "Les Drames et les romans honnêtes," where Baudelaire claims that moral literature is deficient precisely because it fails to depict the immoral:

> L'art est-il utile? Oui. Pourquoi? Parce qu'il est l'art. Y-a-t'il un art pernicieux? Oui. C'est celui qui dérange les conditions de la vie. Le vice est séduisant, il faut le peindre séduisant; mais il traîne avec lui des maladies et des douleurs morales singulières; il faut les décrier. Étudiez toutes les plaies comme un médecin qui fait son service dans un hôpital, et l'école du bon sens, l'école exclusivement morale, ne trouvera plus où mordre…la première condition nécessaire pour faire un art sain est la croyance à l'unité intégral. Je défie qu'on me trouve un seul ouvrage d'imagination qui réunisse toutes les conditions du beau et qui soit un ouvrage pernicieux. (620).

Baudelaire here argues for the value of vice as a subject of study using medical terminology. Vice, he contends, is a condition of human existence just like morality; to neglect it is to violate the unity, and therefore the validity, of art. This passage suggests that art for art's sake is less a philosophy of artificiality than one of integrity, in the sense of wholeness. If unmotivated, art is useful because it has all the conditions of life inherent in it. It becomes about essence, not effect. If motivated, as in the case of these moral dramas, the conditions of life are fundamentally misrepresented, skewed, or omitted. Morality is only half the picture, the way the diminished God is only half the Baudelairean cosmos. Satan is simultaneously the other half of that cosmos, the

adversary; a metaphor for the human capacity for sin; and the reason that is capable of understanding that capacity.

Baudelaire applies similar medical terminology to his explanation of love; to Baudelaire, "[i]l y'a dans l'acte de l'amour une grande ressemblance avec la torture ou avec une opération chirurgicale" (1257). Though the invocation of torture suggests that this is perhaps merely a facetious statement meant to equate love and pain, the idea of surgery also suggests both a pedagogical and ameliorative value, designed to vivisect or to heal; the notion raised by Baudelaire's excoriation of Sand, that self-knowing evil is capable of healing, permits an interpretation where the two functions go hand in hand. Georges Blin finds the fragment about torture to be the key to a philosophy of eroticism in Baudelaire's work predicated on distance and pain:

> Le caractère presque révoltante du tableau tient au fait que Baudelaire décrit l'acte érotique absolument du dehors et à froid, comme pourrait le faire un spectateur pur; un témoin qui ne se prendrait pas la contagion…il nous contraint à assister en observateurs impartiaux à un drame dont nous ne sommes jamais que les acteurs ou parfois, come 'voyeurs,' les complices. (16)

In these clinical terms, the disease of love can also be thought of as the ideal experiment, because it is capable of simultaneously testing the limits of both reason and desire—it is a human impulse that lends itself far better to romantic poetry than rational dissection. The heart is a pump, and judicious vivisection can teach us what makes it beat; the desire is a far more ephemeral attribute. Too, where torture reveals mental capabilities, in particular the mind's ability to transcend or escape the physical condition, a surgery opens the body and permits comprehension—if not alteration—of that physical condition. So Valmont's continual self-documentation in his letters to Merteuil is more than just a dandy seeking to perfect his own sublimity, though self-perfection is still a critical part of the libertine

persona; it could be read as a set of case notes, written, as it were, by a doctor seeking to understand the symptoms of his own disease.

Baudelaire's poems trace the developing conviction that self-understanding is Satan's particular benediction. The most damning human flaw is passivity; without encouragement, man never confronts himself. "Au Lecteur," the invocation piece to *Les Fleurs du mal*, announces its preoccupation with such human fault in the first line: "La sottise, l'erreur, le péché, la lésine" (79). Like ennui, these are not particularly significant vices; they are also not sins of execution. The middle of the poem is populated by demons both mythological and psychological: first Satan Trismégiste, the alchemist who vaporizes free will, "le riche métal de notre volonté" and the puppet master who ensures that men find charm in the repugnant; then legions of demons that occupy the brain like worms. Man, we are told, descends a step further into Hell every day; this is the only action in the poem that is consistent and productive. All the rest—the seething of demons, the pulling of strings, the rocking of souls, the gamboling of animalian sins—are just repetitive and unproductive motion. "L'Irrémédiable" follows that descending man deeper into Hell. The poem presents a sequence of images of suspension, of entrapment in the dark: an angel sucked into a nightmare vortex, a bewitched man in a viper's pit, a damned man descending an endless staircase, a ship trapped in ice. In spite of its irremediable condition, in each case the fallen object reaches for freedom and, in the case of the bespelled man, shafts of light. That light, it seems, is not that of God's grace, but of the Devil's, because these moments are said to be proof of Satan's best work; that light manifests again when descent reaches its crisis, the moment "[q]u'un cœur devenu son miroir!" and a trembling star is revealed within the well of truth. In the final stanza, that

star gathers strength, becomes a torch, and is revealed at last: "La conscience dans la Mal!" Although there is no escape from entrapment, the poem suggests there is nonetheless purpose to the descent—Satan's work forces man into confrontation with the truth of himself; Satan's grace awakens the spark of conscience amid the evil and fans it into flame. "Les Litanies de Satan" explicitly enumerates Satan's gifts to mankind, among them "le goût du Paradis" conveyed, through love, to those who would never otherwise know it, after which the supplicant speaker requests the boon of knowledge, in the form of the chance to rest eternally "sous l'Arbre de Science,/…à l'heure ou sur ton front/ Comme un Temple nouveau ses rameaux s'épandront!" To call Baudelaire's vision of Satan benevolent in these poems may be a step to far; it is clear, however, that in his view, Satan holds knowledge in his gift, and, regardless of the hazards posed by sin and damnation, receipt of that knowledge is beneficial.

As a stand-in for Satan on earth, Valmont would also have knowledge in his gift. The arena of seduction in which a libertine operates provides not only a means for understanding the self, but also a means of discovering the nature of others, a seemingly necessary tool in the workbag of a specialist in delusion. A significant part of Valmont's practice in the novel is refinement of his reception; all the time he is seducing Tourvel and training Cécile, Valmont is cataloguing their reactions, evaluating and validating his techniques. You could even consider the letters to Merteuil a kind of peer review. But these are matters of effect, rather than essence, so it is perhaps natural that these passages do not make it into Baudelaire's notes at this stage. Baudelaire's analysis of most of the female characters in *Dangerous Liaisons* is cursory, so perhaps it is difficult for him to see what would be gleaned from their limited desires. Cécile, for instance, is gullible at

best, dirt—literally—at worst. Rosemonde is spoken of as two-dimensional. Volanges does not even merit a character sketch. Only Tourvel is spoken of in positive terms, as an "admirable création…[u]ne Eve touchante"; like Eve, she is the arbitrary creation of some absent power, left to wander the garden without even the benefit of a pocket guide to snakes (643). Valmont's seduction may be her apple, the route to essential knowledge, but she fails to overcome her submissiveness.[39] In her study of Baudelaire's notes, Marguerite-Marie Stevens extrapolates this failure, and Baudelaire's deficiencies of attention, into a reading where these women, though scarcely more than animals in Baudelaire's view, are also complicit victims of the Valmont-Merteuil machine. She defines the libertine "will to power" as "the knowledge of evil brought to light in the conscience, the cruelty of self-comprehension, the penetration of the depths of the heart…" Self-knowledge is, in her view, the horror Valmont and Merteuil inflict on their victims.[40] The victims find themselves introduced unexpectedly to their own baser impulses. Without the rational apparatus to make sense of this essence, to integrate it into the idea of the self, these victims are forced back into the arms of effects-driven traditional morality. For Cécile, whose naïveté is her sole convent-approved personality trait, exposure to her dark side inspires rejection of her sensuality and withdrawal into the very convent life that failed to educate her adequately. For Tourvel, whose pious morality is a long-cherished part of her self-conception, the revelation of her own vulnerability shatters her faith. These women are victims precisely because they are unable to face up to the degraded aspects of human nature; they lack the capability to reunite the moral and the immoral in the manner that Baudelaire prescribes for moral literature. However, since the women in this novel get short shrift in Baudelaire's analysis, the psychology of

the libertine victim is not a matter for extensive consideration. The notion of the involuntary imposition of self-awareness does, however, have interesting implications for the novel's readership; if we are victims of the novel the way these women are victims of libertine seduction, then our impulse to submit is worthy of the same rational examination as the libertine impulse to seduce. Indeed, it is essential. In any case, Stevens' reading of Laclos suggests that libertine literature was already preoccupied by issues of knowledge, exposure, and experience, so Baudelaire's preoccupation with Satan and original sin is less a projection than an appropriation under new terms. Laclos might not be quite prepared to acknowledge Valmont's parity with God, but he certainly positions him as a being that transcends the human, permitting him to challenge the world in terms of timelessness: "Voyez mon ouvrage et cherchez-en dans le siècle un second exemple" (646). Clearly, Valmont's self-perception as a titan of the age, with an unparalleled talent for seduction and destruction, omnipotent and untouchable, differs little from that of Baudelaire.

Baudelaire's notes for the analysis of *Dangerous Liaisons* isolate two components of libertinage—the capacity for self-awareness and the acquisition of self-knowledge—as crucial. But his notes never specifically address issues of contemporary relevance. Why make this a subject of criticism? Why not leave Laclos, like Chorier, to be an obscure reference in a hypothetical museum or a color-coordinated book moldering on an aesthete's library shelf? The answer may lie in Baudelaire's brief—but life-changing—attack of republican zeal. Lois Hyslop argues that the disappointment after Baudelaire's personal involvement in the failed revolution of 1848—he founded one revolutionary newspaper, worked on the editorial staff of another, and may even, according to less-

than-reliable anecdotal evidence, have taken up arms—resulted in an ongoing contempt for both the indolence and apathy of the common man and the practical ineffectualness of most political reform.[41] The critical exception, for Hyslop, is Proudhon, whose brief but repeatable aphorism "Dieu, c'est le mal," emphasizing that God is tyranny, could believably have been Valmont's own. In the Valmont depicted in the notes, Baudelaire builds a figure capable of pursuing a philosophical path in an eminently practical manner, an incisive thinker who executes strategies, refines methods, understands his own evil (and thus his own failures), and can cope with his own emotions—in short, an attractive model of the practical revolutionary and the effective political thinker, everything that, in Baudelaire's view, the nineteenth century is too romantic to produce itself. Unlike the Utopian reformers, Valmont's philosophical pursuits necessitate continual action—instead of retreating into the stunted, sequestered inactivity of Danceny, Cécile, or Merteuil at the end of the novel, Valmont's death can be interpreted as an active pursuit, self-destruction as a strategy by which other schemes are set in motion. Unlike the common man, who, a mere three years after revolution, voted in the authoritarian rule of Napoleon III without a murmur, the philosophical standards Valmont sets for his success rescues sex from mere repetitive motion and short-lived gratification. It is the genius behind the obscenity; it creates goal-oriented philosophical journeys out of what would otherwise be mere mechanical encounters. Valmont seeks experience, actively choosing targets, means, and methods. He takes responsibility for his choices, initiating suicidal duels which simultaneously expiate his guilt and act as the catalyst which removes the incompetent from the path of wisdom. His late-blooming sensitivity suggests the potential for growth; how much, and in which direction, Baudelaire never explores.

Knowledge, self-awareness, and sensitivity are the competencies that make him a successful peripatetic in this sense; libertine literature's vaunted ability to substitute for experience permits the reader to review the original text with fresh eyes, to make the journey with him. Once Baudelaire's critique outlines the libertine's advantageous qualities, Valmont's story provides the model for how to be the sort of philosophical and political animal the century needs. This critique of *Dangerous Liaisons* permits Baudelaire to set the stage for the possibility of a new road to personal and cultural redemption, a method predicated, not on the rejection of immorality that romantic nineteenth-century notions of religion and love might advocate, but on its recognition and integration. The hunger for experience that makes man human, rather than angelic, should be fed at will, and with purpose.

CHAPTER 4

SWINBURNE'S "LAUS VENERIS", OR
THE NIHILIST TRIUMPHANT

The writers examined so far tend to privilege the early phases of seduction—disarmament, enticement, personalization—at the expense of the final phase, control, perhaps because the exercise of free will is considered such an important exercise in the development of an appropriately libertine politics. In order to critique the newly moral platform of his fellow reformists, Byron deploys all four strategies of seduction in the story of his reimagined Don Juan, disarming his reader with a quaintly inoffensive adolescent rather than a rapacious libertine, enticing with a prolonged narrative that speaks to and responds to a reader's desires for titillation and revelation, personalizing with a narrative that moves gradually but convincingly through a series of seemingly exotic escapades from the shores of feudal Spain to the nineteenth-century British reader's own back doorstep, and finally controlling the reader's realizations by attenuating the delivery of judgment and resolution beyond the point at which it becomes meaningless. In order to model in Valmont a thinking revolutionary that is suitable to cope with the romanticism of the nineteenth century, Baudelaire lays the groundwork for an argument that disarms through an emphasis on the goodness of the author and the sympathies of his hero, contrives a sense of intimacy (and need for change) by using the universally familiar sense of romantic disappointment as a counterpoint to both explain

libertine philosophy and critique nineteenth-century rational failings, and entices by aggrandizing his Valmont into a titan for the contemporary world, a rationalist intelligent enough for objective self-analysis and strong enough for complete self-knowledge.

In "Laus Veneris," instead, although Swinburne also advocates for the advantages of free will, the bias is distinctly anticlerical rather than antiparty or prorevolutionary, and his strategy for seduction emphasizes personalization and control, performing only brief nods in the direction of disarmament, in the framing of the poem, and enticement, in Tannhäuser's doubled heroism as both a knight and a monk, before the poem entraps the reader in an intimate, behind-the-eyes experience of Tannhäuser's subjectivity, his culpability in his own corruption, and his experience of memory, love, and guilt. The result is a vigil in the crypt shared by Tannhäuser and the reader, a crucible from which Tannhäuser arises a very different kind of knight than the man of God who lay down.

The Tradition

The story of Tannhäuser, a topic which enjoyed a faddish popularity throughout the nineteenth century and was rewritten in a number of genres including verse, prose, and opera, was already tainted with pagan associations before Wagner got ahold of it and turned the story into a love triangle between a singer, a sacred love, and a profane one. It is very loosely based upon the existence of a fourteenth-century German minstrel; in the myth that bears his name, Tannhäuser the singer is drawn to (or abducted by) Venus because of his musical gifts, disappearing for seven years. Though at first glance it fits the tradition of supernatural seduction stories beloved by Romantics more closely than the randy literary exploitation of nunnery, harem, and palace favored by libertines, the *Tannhäuserleid* has two key differences that set it apart from the usual fairy story— that

seven-year hiatus, which leaves huge gap in the middle of most versions of the story, ripe for reader personalization; and the sexual expertise that characterizes both of its main players.[42] Venus is, after all, the exiled goddess of love, a deposed figurehead from a pagan religion whose business is profane love and whose bedsports might reasonably be expected not to conform to any Pauline precept. As a minnesinger, Tannhäuser's profession hinges on the ability to write about and sing the conventions of love convincingly, if not seductively, so even before the abduction it seems clear that he and Venus share similar interests. Like libertines, they are both in the "business" of love: what Tannhäuser knows in theory, Venus can supply in practice. What Tannhäuser sings of for money, Venus manipulates for power. Add to this common interest a seven-year hiatus away from prying eyes and Christian influence, and the development of a pedagogical relationship regarding sexual matters—the dynamic that underpins libertine texts such as *Venus in the Cloister* and *Philosophy in the Bedroom*—appears likely, if not inevitable. Nineteenth-century writers, in particular, would rush to fill in the details of this relationship, with varying degrees of explicitness, in ways that suit their ultimate aims, some preferring a more domestic tone, some a more tragic one. Few focus entirely on the knight's sojourn with Venus. As we will see, Beardsley and Swinburne are among those few who look to make the hiatus the whole of their story, building on that erotic preoccupation and the comparatively recent publicity generated by performances of the opera to make Tannhäuser a libertine *après la lettre,* in the manner of the libertine adaptations of Byron and Baudelaire.

The bones of the nineteenth-century Tannhäuser story is the same in almost all cases—drawn by a supernatural manifestation, the knight disappears for some time into

the mountain, but then emerges, contrite, often with the help of the Virgin Mary, to atone for his apostasy, with mixed results (frequently, the miracle of the blooming staff overrides the papal denial of salvation, but too late).[43] Though in many cases the plot focuses on the peregrinations of the knight in his quest to repent his sins and save his soul, Tannhäuser's story is seldom seen through Tannhäuser's eyes; writers go to great lengths to separate the knight's story from the knight's perspective, and to avoid talking about what happened in the Hill of Venus. In Ludwig Tieck's "The Trusty Eckart," for instance, the third-person narrative is told from the point of view, not of the knight, but of the friend Friederich, to whom the knight must justify his long disappearance. Driven by grief at the loss of his parents and beloved, the knight calls upon Satan to show him the song that bewitched the legendary Eckart; the song acts as a map and a key, drawing Tannhäuser to the Venus-Hill. The seven years are dispatched in a page of febrile prose; the pilgrimage to Rome, likewise, is but the work of a moment. The cyclic form of the narrative—the features of loss, sorrow, and bewitchment that are identical in the cases of Eckart, Tannhäuser, and Friederich—suggest that Tieck's version is less a story than a parable; it is not about the individual and the particulars of his seduction, it is about the ease with which the honorable may be driven from the path of righteousness by distress. Heinrich Heine, instead, turns the lesson into a joke. Like the Von Arnim version from which the *Once a Week* poem is translated, Heine's narrative is in the third person objective; framed as a ballad, it relates the events of what is effectively a domestic dispute primarily through dialogue. Both versions begin with the departure: Tannhäuser's disillusionment with Venus results in immediate repentance and pilgrimage to Rome. The *Once a Week* poem suggests through a stray pronoun that a human beloved might be at

the bottom of the change of heart, but spends no time describing her or the situation. It also deploys the trope of the blooming staff to signify mercy from on high; however, the messengers announcing the beneficence fail to find the knight before he returns to the Hill, making that absolution moot. Heine dresses a similar narrative of futility and *schadenfreude* in the vestments of comic opera: because he is jealous of the lovers the immortal Venus will have after him,[44] Tannhäuser storms off to Rome to be saved from his obsession. Salvation is denied, the hero speeds home, and the myth becomes a vehicle for tongue-in-cheek German socio-political critique. In either case, the ballad frame demotes the dialogue from experience to hearsay; there are essentially two levels of third-person narration, the perspective that recounts the dialogue and the perspective of the balladeer. In the *Once a Week* version, the balladeer editorializes on Venus' wonders, which is at least suggestive of Tannhäuser's experience. The balladeer in Heine merely proposes the introductory admonition to avoid replicating Tannhäuser's sins, an irrelevant point because the only real sin in play is gluttony; as Clyde Hyder points out, the damned knight is "a burgher with a good German stomach" and the evil seductress "his *Hausfrau*" (1203).

Wagner's opera and the Edward Lytton-Julian Fane poem attempt to restore the high moral tenor to the story by making it a tale, not so much of the Tannhäuser's repentance, but of a woman's noble sacrifice. To reinforce the altered focus, Wagner melds the circumstances of the *Tannhäuserleid* with the singing contest from *Der Wartburgkrieg*. The attractions of the Hörsel are dispensed with in a single orgiastic scene where nymphs, cupids, satyrs, and Bacchantes cavort balletically for the amusement of an apparently unamused knight.[45] Tannhäuser and Venus argue about his

dissatisfaction with the static nature of eternity, and he departs the Hörsel; immediately thereafter he is drawn into a minnesang competition for the hand of his former love. The remainder of the opera follows the beloved, rather than the lover: Elisabeth capriciously visits the singing hall; Elisabeth hints at her secret love; Elisabeth is betrayed by Tannhäuser's song, but stands firm in the sinner's defense; Elisabeth offers her life in exchange for mercy for the sinner. It is only after Elisabeth's death that Tannhäuser returns, in the final scene of the final act, to relate the story of his pilgrimage and his failed petition for absolution. Even then, Elisabeth steals the scene as her corpse's entrance vanquishes the Venus *couchant* and salvages the knight's soul. For an eponymous opera about a singer, Wagner's *Tannhäuser* spends remarkably little time letting Tannhäuser sing—an attribute perhaps designed to avoid the interjection of too much first-person perspective in an otherwise third-person spectacle.

While the Lytton-Fane version, *Tannhäuser, or the Battle of the Bards*, elaborates on the singing competition, it gives the knight more opportunity to speak, but less to say. It opens with 110 lines of third-person editorializing about Venus and her history of seduction and corruption, and talk about her prey's disillusion as a universal condition, rather than a particular experience of the knight: Venus is invoked out of despair over love for Elizabeth and a decadent interest in the music of the past; the knight then disappears from the court at Wartburg—and also from the reader's view. He arrives back just in time for the contest, the theme of which is love and its "mystery of mysteries" (44); however, his contribution to the proceedings is anything but revelatory. After much thematic call-and-response on the part of the contestants—love as a fountain, love's towering majesty, I-am-love's-vassal-and-will-thump-you-if-you-keep-singing—

Tannhäuser scandalizes the crowd with the exhortation to: "Dare as I dared; to Hörsel go,/ And taste love on the lips of Venus" (64). This rather tame declaration of licentiousness preempts the contest, drives the audience screaming from the room, and gets the knight forced into a pilgrimage to Rome. Tannhäuser may issue the invitation to love's idyll, but the reader never gets the chance to take him up on it.

The Innovation

The usual handling of the Tannhäuser story fails to deliver on the seductive promise of the original myth, distancing and protecting the reader (or the audience) from the licentious interactions between the minnesinger and the goddess of love. Swinburne's version, on the other hand, obliterates the distance between observer and subject, rolling in both its licentiousness and an inescapable first-person perspective within which the reader, like the knight, is trapped. It may be useful to take a moment to examine the point of that licentiousness, and whether Swinburne had a larger philosophical project in hand, of which this poem is but one example. As many critics have noted, dwelling lovingly on his encomia on de Sade, his repeated use of images of alternative sexuality in his work, and his personal predilection for flagellation, Swinburne had an early and particular interest in libertinism, and, as Jerome McGann notes in passing during a chapter otherwise taken up with flagellation, an appreciation for Sadique irony (*Swinburne*, 273). However, in spite of the enthusiasm expressed in "Charenton en 1810," a work Swinburne composed before ever actually reading de Sade, Swinburne remained aware of the limitations in Sadean sexual philosophy and literary technique, and the need to tone down such sexual grotesqueries. In a letter to Richard Monckton Milnes, dated 18 August 1862, Swinburne expresses his reservations. Upon reading *Justine*, it seems, Swinburne

experienced quite the wrong reader response. He laughed. He then read excerpts out loud to an audience, and they laughed. De Sade failed to draw Swinburne into an intimate and absorbing experience of private titillation, because he fails to engage the reader's mind. Swinburne searches for "some sharp and subtle analysis of lust—some keen dissection of pain and pleasure…at least such an exquisite relish of the things anatomized as without explanation would suffice for a stimulant and be comprehensible at once even if unfit for sympathy…" but what he finds is a writer who "takes *bulk* and *number* for greatness" (*Letters* vol. 1 54). Swinburne responds to the infinite recombination of sexual variables—organ *A* in orifice *B*, with a sidebar of violent act *C*—with boredom; there is no room for readerly personalization of experience in such a reductive, declarative text. Swinburne couches his objections in the language of that old adage of twentieth-century fiction, "show, don't tell," apostrophizing: "You have asserted a great deal; prove it now; bring it face to face with us; let the sense of it bite and tickle and sting your reader" (55). He concludes that Sadean anticlericalism is a sham, and that his violence is built from the same impulse to abstinence and rejection of the flesh as the Christian practice of self-mortification. As a libertine writer, it seems, de Sade is worthless[46]; as a poet, however, he is accomplished.

This early critical response to de Sade's work sketches the outlines of a developing personal philosophy that underpins Swinburne's body of work, including "Laus Veneris." The marquis takes the mechanics of sex as his subject; Swinburne explores the mechanics of lust. The marquis explains exhaustively; Swinburne examines, but seldom explains, seeking to impart his message through deployment of the reader's experience rather than appeal to the reader's intellect, creating that quality of

hallucination much remarked upon by his modernist critics. The marquis fails to examine the boundary between, or the interrelatedness of, pain and pleasure; Swinburne, in pursuit of that bright slash of feeling and an annihilation of boundaries, never writes pleasure without pain as its counterpoint.[47] The marquis alienates the reader from the fantasy by filling every instant, every corner of the narrative with declarations of excess; Swinburne disarms and flatters the reader by creating a traditional narrative frame, often allusive and thus familiar, and then undermines his victim by filling that frame with ambiguities, uncertainties that the reader must actively negotiate into a semblance of coherence. For Swinburne, sex matters as more than just a list of deviancies meant to shock and horrify; it is a personal experience, one of emotion and feeling, and so Swinburne personalizes its handling to the fullest extent possible.[48]

"Laus Veneris," like so many other Swinburne poems, personalizes the experience of the narrative through the use of the dramatic monologue in a medieval setting whose twin preoccupations with courtly love and religion make conflict between the Christian and the temporal passions inevitable. As Adam Roberts notes in his brief attempt to rescue the poem from allegations of length-for-length's-sake, the stanzas of "Laus Veneris" are arranged topically into two tri-partite sections with a coda tacked on at the end. The first section is organized by location of interest, Horsel-world-Horsel; the second by Tannhäuser's function, knight-singer-knight. The coda looks to the future, theorizing on love and eternity. Nearly everything that makes up other versions of the tradition—the seduction, the singing, the journey to Rome, and the failed bid for absolution—is related only in the second half of the poem. The entire first half (fifty-two stanzas) is made up of monologue, reverie and, possibly, a kiss. As Anthony Harrison

points out, this reverie mimics the form of an *alba*, a lover's dread of dawn and departure, but the threat of dawn is replaced by the threat of damnation, conceived in terms that are absolutely true to the knight's Christian past. To read the poem is to await that damnation with him, experiencing as he does the utter confusion of life in the Horsel, the agonizing conflict between his Christian and "satanic" allegiances, and the overwhelming nature of his passions.

The poem establishes an atmosphere of confusion the moment it opens. Unlike nearly every other rendition of this myth, here Tannhäuser is not the eponymous hero of the piece; the only name that is invoked in either the title "Laus Veneris" or the elaborate sham epigraph that purports to summarize the story is that of Venus, suggesting that this will be a poem about Venus—which, in a passive sort of way, it is. (It is about Venus only as the object of Tannhäuser's gaze.) The epigraph or preface in libertine texts is usually used to protect both writer and reader from the perceived immorality of the piece, explaining away any deficiencies of virtue with the excuses like bad writing, obsolete manners and morals, or childish impulse, justifying the text's existence as artifact or object lesson in how not to behave. (The reader is then free to revel in the account of the bad behavior, confirmed in the notion that his or her own motives are purely intellectual.) This epigraph disarms that way also, burying the artifact of its narrative under layers of artificial medieval French and invented Renaissance authority, implying a purely historical interest and flattering any reader with enough linguistic capability, or persistence and a dictionary, to decode it. It also obfuscates identity through the brevity of its allusion: an astute reader would have to disregard the red herrings of authorship, date, fanciful French medievalisms, and floral garnishes and recognize that the mention

of the Pope, together with "mes faicts d'armes et de toutes mes belles chansons" and the particular placement of "boutons de feuilles," actually refers to that popular German story about the singing knight. While Hyder makes note of Swinburne's frequent predilection for making up imaginary sources, or "mystifications" as he terms it, as kind of a game, this particular hoax may be more than just idle entertainment (*Swinburne's Literary Career* 10-13). Harrison, for instance, reads the intent of this construction as developmental, so the astute reader would be rewarded with a realization of the cultural significance of his own astuteness: "That the epigraph feigns a Renaissance recapitulation of a medieval myth now appropriated by a nineteenth-century poet reinforces our awareness that matters of literary genealogy are crucial to human 'progress'" (62). Effectively, reiteration changes the way we see—an idea crucial in Tannhäuser's later restatement of his past, and in Swinburne's selection of this popular aesthetic plot to re-tell. Its literary genealogy has already taught the reader all that the external, objective, intellectual trappings of the legend can; it is for Swinburne's version to impose the experience of the knight's internal conflict directly upon the reader—to take the gap already existing in the story and fill it with more gaps. Julia Saville's précis of Swinburne's cosmopolitan views, on the other hand, suggests that the epigraph could be read as a demonstration of the author's powers of national and historical empathy: "to understand the history of another culture well enough to represent it convincingly…the writer must be both passionately invested in the nation represented and experience a spiritual affinity with it…" (697). Since, over the course of the poem, passionate investment and reinterpretation set the stage for such affinity, doing the work to decode this sham epigraph could reward the reader with both a preview of coming events and

proof of the author's authority to speak on such issues—but it still fails to clear up basic confusions like the identity of the poem's subject or speaker.

Swinburne robs the reader of the pretense of historical distance and demands an intimate engagement of the reader's imagination in the very first verse. The initial problem the reader confronts in the poem is one of identity; many readers would not be able to establish identities for speaker and the object spoken of without, in some fashion, negotiating to fill the gaps and thus personalizing the text. Without such personalization, the grammar of the opening stanza is vague to the point of incomprehensibility. The first image appears to be lover's-eye view of the beloved, delivered by (as those of us who have decoded the epigraph and understood the allusions therein know) the as-yet-unnamed hero and knight. The lovers have been caught, apparently, at a moment of post-coital stillness:

> Asleep or waking is it? For her neck,
> Kissed over close, wears yet a purple speck
> Wherein the pained blood falters and goes out;
> Soft, and stung softly—fairer for a fleck. (ll. 1-4)

A less astute reader of the epigraph—or one without the patience to wade through it with a French dictionary in hand[49]—may have missed the allusion, and would, at this point, be utterly confused about who is speaking and about what, as he or she is confronted at the outset of the verse by an unidentified "I", a question in the first line, and the multivalent pronoun "it." It is reasonable to assume that the "her" whose neck is on view is Venus, as the poem is in praise of the goddess; however, that "it" is deeply problematic, as the possible grammatical referents in the stanza are "neck," in the first line, or "speck" later on, and neither of these are typically seen to have either a sleeping or waking state, even in the most surreal poetry.[50] Is Venus a she, or an object? Without the "it," that state of

somnolence would obviously apply to the beloved as a woman. With it, there is no comfortable antecedent for the pronoun, unless the beloved's stillness in the first few stanzas is taken to signify death; in that case, though, the corpse is identified pronominally as both an object and a female in the same line, so the vagueness ameliorated by that venture into necrophilia is converted almost instantly into inconsistency. Perhaps more reasonable is the supposition that grammatical correctness has been thwarted by the technique of *in medias res* storytelling, and the "it" refers to some concept about which the speaker was thinking before the reader was introduced. The nature of that notion is impossible to fix with certainty, although the focus on bruises, sucking lips, and the presence (or absence) of blood suggest a number of possible sleeping things, including the soul, the flame of life, and the impulse to sadism. As it stands, however, unless he or she has recourse to that historical understanding of the legend to which the epigraph so briefly and teasingly refers, the reader has no foreknowledge with which to resolve these uncertainties; he or she can only apply personal experience, negotiate tentative identities for the raft of uncertainties presented, and hope for the best. In this manner, from the very beginning of the poem Swinburne demands, rather than invites, the personalization of the relationship between the reader and the hero of this poem. He thrusts the reader into that intimate connection with the narrative and its players that Sade cannot manage by forcing the reader immediately to identify with and define the nature of the speaker from personal experience; it is the simplest way for the uncertainties in the grammar to be resolved. The intimacy thus seeded can only grow.

Fortunately, the referents of those pronouns may not, in fact, be the point. The relevant attribute may be shared experience; the reader does not—cannot—know, the same way that Tannhäuser cannot know his unresponsive beloved. The opening of the poem, from title through epigraph to first line, seems to be configured for the purpose of thwarting expectations, much in the same way Byron's attenuated ending to *Don Juan* thwarts expectations of judgment: anything even the most literary reader thinks he or she knew about Venus, the *Tannhäuserleid*, medieval love poetry, the conventions of panegyric, or of oration is to be undermined by Swinburne's highly original handling of "Laus Veneris." It becomes impossible to maintain a separate perspective; the reader has no recourse to historical, mythological, or intellectual distance. Thaïs Morgan points to the reader here as a kind of a peeping tom: because of the first-person perspective, "we are placed in the position of voyeurs, looking in through the bedroom window at the two lovers" ("Swinburne's Dramatic Monologues" 186). Like traditional pornography, then, the poem could be expected to stimulate the erotic feelings it simulates. Richard Sieburth suggests instead that the very vagueness lulls the reader into a state of erotic receptivity "by numbing the analytic faculties of the intellect—an effect achieved not through trance-inducing music, but through a systematic indefiniteness of reference" (351). To be sure, this would be a new strategy in the history of libertine literature, as a titillating definiteness, signified by the invariable lesson in the naming of the genitals, is usually an early step in the suborning of the innocent. Rather, this indefiniteness here stirs the reader to an action much more intimate than voyeurism and much more intellectually active than trance; in order to make sense of the narrative going forward, the reader must actively construct an imaginative connection through the eyes of the speaker. The identification

Byron invites with careful disarmament and Baudelaire incites with grandiose praise, Swinburne forges with strategic grammar. The intellectual shell, the basis for calculation so flattered by the epigraph is stripped away, and the reader is decanted, not into a seat some safe distance away from the heretical action, but directly into the space behind Tannhäuser's eyes. The reader is not told his story, the reader hears his thoughts. The speaker's lack of identity comes to make sense because Tannhäuser does not think of himself in the moment as anything but "I"; the "it" remains undefined because Tannhäuser's thoughts have been already defined; the beloved stays unnamed because, in the proximity of the lovers' clinch, ruled by a visual rather than a verbal paradigm, she does not need one.[51]

This unstable paradigm prevails through the rest of the poem as Tannhäuser first sees, then metaphorizes, then interprets; the reader experiences in tandem because, until the Pope speaks the curse of the blooming staff, the poem sustains no other voice, no other viewpoint than Tannhäuser's own. Unlike every other version where she appears, the Venus here is silent. She fulfills the trope of the seducing fairy only by virtue of her existence, not by her interaction. She has passed the staff of seduction on, to Tannhäuser or to the poem itself. Her stillness allows the self-analytical reverie that will become the mechanism for emotional growth to persist. As in Baudelaire's depiction of Valmont, it is the libertine's narcissism that is the key, eventually, to understanding the self as well as the beloved; the internal work of understanding and refining the self is required in order to embark on the external work of refining the circumstance with others. (This mimics the reader's situation as presupposed by Byron and Baudelaire, as well—the intellectual work accomplished through identifying with and following the practical moral

development of the literary hero is meant to influence and assist in the practical moral development of the political man—in effect, to create a better politician, voter, or revolutionary.)

Venus' lack of interaction also calls into question the reality of the knight's situation, even within the poem. Tannhäuser's utter inability to distinguish between the literal and the figurative infects the reader; there is no stable referent, no boundary between the concrete and the imaginary, no solid purchase for an independent interpretation of reality. This recalls Barthes' requirement for seduction, a closed world within which the libertine may dictate terms and simulate realities. For example, when Tannhäuser sees "[c]rowned with gilt thorns and clothed with flesh like fire,/ Love…" (ll.35-6), the simile that is then constructed—Love as the weaver—is made literal by the following line: "Till when the spool is finished, lo I see/ His web reeled off, curls and goes out like steam" (ll. 47-8). Enumerating the changes is like riding a swing, or perhaps a roundabout: Love (a figure) is seen standing at the head of the bed (an allegory, the figurative made concrete), then is compared to a weaver (a figure) whose weaving is seen coiling (a concrete image) which is compared to steam (a figure)… It is as if the poem compresses and cycles the phases of the romantic ode—observation, meditation, vision—into one grand sensory hallucination. Or a remarkably fantastical reality. The Horsel is, after all, a supernatural world; who is to say which figures may not in truth exist?

Over time, exposure to this kind of compression against a background of uncertainty trains the reader to elide expected boundaries—between the real and the imaginary, the literal and the figurative, the modifier and the modified. For instance, Morgan argues that the repeated references to heat in the first 52 stanzas—the hot air, the

"dry desire," as well as a reference to red chambers—indicate that the Horsel is an analogue of Hell. Her argument makes the fair point that these similarities support the reading that the eternal pleasures experienced there constitute an active sabotage of the knight's Christian belief system ("Swinburne's Dramatic Monologues" 187). However, the majority of these references to heat are part of figures that have little to do with place. The air may be hot and the daylight burning, but it is Love that is clothed with "flesh like fire," the knight's body that shakes "as the flame," "hot hard" night which "falls like fire," and time which has "hot hungry days." The image of red chambers coexists in a stanza with references to Venus' body and its adornments, suggesting that the figure is dealing as much with orifices as with rooms. Such reapplication of modifiers to other nouns—this synesthesia—violates both the boundaries of syntax and the expectations of experience. Seeing beyond such boundaries is a critical skill in the sort of literary interpretation that Morgan is performing, because it permits access to possibilities beyond the literal meaning of the sentence; seeing beyond such boundaries is a critical ability in Tannhäuser's repertoire because it eventually permits him–and the reader—to see the divergent possibilities of present experience without reference to preconceptions, free of the biases that might make him prey to malign influences, untoward social pressure, and the temptation to rush to judgment.[52]

Tannhäuser's past, the poem points out at some length, is all preconception. "Laus Veneris" follows Von Arnim and the *Once A Week* translation in emphasizing the role of Tannhäuser the knight at the expense of Tannhäuser the singer. Swinburne does Von Arnim one better, however, by elevating Tannhäuser the knight from general service into a military order, making him an enforcer of the laws of both State and Church:

> For I was of Christ's choosing, I God's knight,
> No blinkard heathen stumbling for scant light;
> I can well see, for all the dusty days
> Gone past, the clean great time of goodly fight. (ll. 209-12)

At first glance, the knight once occupied an enviable proximity to perfection; from the standpoint of seduction, he is a figure who is always already enticing. At the moment of which he speaks, his faith affords him a clear-sightedness of which the followers of other religions can only barely conceive. He is appointed to his position, not by fallible men, but by the Redeemer and ultimate judge of men; he serves the Creator, and is thus, logically, a cog in God's great plan. And he has the comfort of knowing that the violence that is his métier is sanctioned by the progenitor of universal order itself. His work seems to have a pleasing geometry, with its "rows/ Of beautiful mailed men" (l. 216), the opponent's "square cheeks" (l. 245), even the angle of the sword that "dips/ Sharp from the beautifully bending head" (ll. 218-9). It has uniformity, in that those he served, served with, and fought against were all men. It also has rhythm—in the battle noises alluded to by the alliteration of "breathing battle sharp with blows,/ With shriek of shafts and snapping short of bows" (ll. 213-4) and "sounds of sharp spears at great tourneyings" (l. 279), as well as in the moments of peace, when "chiming bridle smite and smite again" (l. 240) and the knights sing of a love they, as clergy, are not supposed to understand. His universe is dualistic, and he is perpetually on the side of right, as evinced by his rationalization upon the death of a foe: "Some woman fell a-weeping, whom this thief/ Would beat when he had drunken; yet small grief/ Hath any for the ridding of such knaves…" (ll. 249-51) Apparently, the fact that he is an enemy makes him a knave, therefore a thief, therefore a wife-beater, and therefore his wife's grief is trivial and bound to be short-lived. In essence, by being not-me and not-of-mine, Tannhäuser

reasons, this man deserves death. McGann underlines the cruelty of such virtue-laden clarity: "His whole understanding is so crammed with his religious principles that he cannot see the gruesome inhumanity not only in the deed himself, but in his sense of delight over it, and—perhaps worst of all—in the moral blindness which alone could provoke his last, callous remarks" (*Swinburne* 257). Yet in the dualistic universe defined by a deity—as is shown in the recapitulation of Venus' violently capricious rule—inhumanity is not the issue. Compliance is, and Tannhäuser complies. (Until he meets a naked woman in a field, anyway.) This seems a simple, unequivocal existence, to be sure, but not one replete with empathy.

Venus is the catalyst for Tannhäuser's growth because her world, by contrast, exists outside these dualistic options. The Tannhäuser myth traditionally treats Venus as a deity whose obsolescence has, effectively, made her human. She may hold court in exile—Wagner's stage directions in the final version of the opera, for instance, specify an elaborate opening ballet performed by Venus' subjects for which Venus herself is the audience, making the opera itself a kind of meta-command performance—but she loves, speaks, angers, and even cooks in the manner of a normal, if arrogant, human woman.[53] The preface to the *Once a Week* translation goes so far as to present Heine's version of the downfall of the Greek gods as necessary context. Mars and Venus fare the best post-Olympus, considerably demoted but continuing on in situations true to their appetites: Mars capitalizes on his destructive bent by going to war as a German soldier while "Venus…took refuge, with a licentious crew of nymphs, in an enchanted mountain, called the Mons Veneris, where she spends her time in riotous living. Woe to the rash, who, allured by the sound of music and revelry, seek her attractive court" (211). The

appended warning notwithstanding, it seems very much as if Venus, whose caprice once motivated and destroyed heroes, is now herself a victim, a bird in a gilded cage. In any case, the manner of her presentation implies that she is no more than one of a crowd.

Swinburne's Venus, however, is a different entity entirely, because she is constantly represented as something that exists outside the human dimension, in a perpetual liminal state of betweenness. Once upon a time, it seems, she, like the Christian God, was the author of a dualistic world, because "The strewings of the ways wherein she trod/ Were the twain seasons of the day and night" (ll. 11-2). The trend in previous versions of the Tannhäuser story is to preserve this dualism by fixing the goddess in opposition to a female figure of Christian virtue—the Virgin Mary or, later, the self-sacrificing Elizabeth. Such a duality preserved the antithesis between sacred and profane love, and permitted a clear and objective choice.[54] As we know, however, libertine literature is less taken with the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane (except in cases where it can show the sacred is profane) than the effects of that which is generally thought profane upon the person, sacred or not, so, for Swinburne, such an antithesis is obsolete. After her fall, Venus is shown to be something other: not the sacred goddess of Greek mythology or the profane idol under Christian theology, but a third kind of power, existing outside of a world of theological constructs. Her effect becomes polyvalent—she creates a tertiary state by being impossible to fix in a binary proposition. In Tannhäuser's first sighting of her, for instance, she is framed by the world, but not necessarily of it:

> …A great elder tree
> Held back its heaps of flowers to let me see
> The ripe tall grass, and one that walked therein,
> Naked…
> She walked between the blossom and the grass… (ll. 305-9)

The knight presents a contradictory account of the meeting, first claiming that the naked figure is in the grass, then in the space between the flowers and the grass. Given that the only flowers identified in the scene belong to a "great" tree, it appears that the lady must be cutting a swath through the air, between the tree canopy and the field, rather than across the land—that third option teased out between the two possibilities of under the blossoms or through the grass.[55] Too, Tannhäuser's revision is suggestive of a change in his manner of interpretation. A naked woman walking, while fortuitous and surprising, is still a condition that conforms to the natural order of things and is thus consistent with the knight's preconceptions about reality. A naked woman floating is not. It is as if, in retelling the story of his first encounter with the lady, his initially literal perception is colored by the uncertainties that characterize his stay in the Horsel—the binary options of a dualistic reality (she is/is not walking in the field) are fractured into a multiplicity of possible states (she is/is not walking in/over/under the field/tree)—inducing revision, but no clarification, in the second iteration. Her actual location remains unconfirmed. When Tony Garland argues that Venus' unattainability throughout the poem is a function of Tannhäuser's recognition of her sin at this moment, maintaining that "as much as he is attracted to her, his recognition of the religious transgression she represents is repulsive," which creates "a state of union and division between attraction and revulsion that has no end" (640), he effectively replicates Tannhäuser's original, rigidly dualistic mindset. But the passage he quotes may also indicate that the knight has progressed beyond repulsion; where Garland reads the beautiful body and the sin as a compound object of the verb, two separate entities that Tannhäuser sees, they may also function as compound objects of the preposition, so that what the knight perceives is the "beauty of…her sin" (l. 311). If this

is the case, the line only indicates attraction to that anomalous third state in which splendor and sin may be combined. The antithesis between the sacred and the profane is thus dissolved; all that is left is love.

Exposure to such a perpetual state of uncertainty apparently alters Tannhäuser's previously polarized thinking, but it also suggests that he is the agent behind his own corruption. His nostalgic reminiscences of a bracing, homosocial, clerical past are infected by creeping equivocation—in speaking of the idyllic then he is inclined to use images drawn from the tortured now. For instance, in describing the light on the battlefield, he lapses into descriptors applicable to the subterranean caverns of the Horsel: "My sword doth, seeming fire in my own eyes,/ Leaving all colors in them brown and red/ And flecked with death…" (ll. 222-4). Physically, the knight is experiencing a complementary afterimage induced by the excessive light reflected from the sword blade; figuratively, however, the temporary blindness, the red like Venus' chambers, the brown like the dust, and the flecks—recalling the bite mark on the lady's neck and the flecks of blood on Love's loom—suggest that he can no longer view the events of his past from that original, seemingly lucid point of view. The Horsel exists as both a negative print, a reversal of his past experiences, and a kind of taint in his thinking: he remembers himself blinded by the light, so was perhaps—his new perspective suggests—not so lucid after all. He will emerge from these caverns to make his pilgrimage blind once again; one wonders if he has ever been capable of vision. That glare, that "edged light" of the sword in action is "like a snake," "lithe as lips" (ll. 217-20) evoking Venus' snake-like woven hair and lovely mouth, making his violence in the service of Christ in some way analogous to the goddess' capricious annihilation, once upon a time, of her lovers.

As Tannhäuser's reverie continues, the binaries of God and Venus amalgamate, by virtue of certain shared metonyms, into a single figure of power, danger, and violence. Venus's woven hair, for instance, is also a characteristic of the knights of God, even though it seems, at first glance, ill-suited to the gender and occupation of Tannhäuser's compatriots. However, when Elisabeth Gitter traces the Pre-Raphaelite fascination with women's hair, she finds it a symbol with a range of contradictory meanings, aligned in turn with associations of wealth, exhibition, expression, disorder, volatility, and entrapment. These connotations apply beautifully to the pre-Christian Venus, in all of her fickle glory. Early in the poem, the knight undertakes a point-by-point comparison of Christ and his beloved, and Venus' preeminence is due to the wealth, the plenitude, and above all the aesthetic of her "wonderfully woven hair" (l. 18), worn "most thick with many a carven gem" (l. 203). Her lovers first recognized her unpredictability and their own danger when, lying under her, they "[h]eard sudden serpents hiss across her hair" (l. 116). Later her "chaplet" and her jewelry would "drip with flower-like red" as she destroyed them (l. 122). Of course, this is the Venus of some distant past; by the time she is seen by the Christian knight crossing that field, "[n]aked, with hair shed over to the knee," she has ceased to be the scourge of the pagan world—Tannhäuser is the only lover ever to survive her attention, lying over her inert form and gazing at the prospect of eternity. The power of the hair, and all that it implies, has in the contemporary world becomes the purview of the minstrel knights, whose swords with their serpentine movement do the work of the Medusa, who as knights wear their hair "[c]rowned with green leaves beneath white hoods of vair" (l. 278) and as minstrels sweetened by "the bay-leaf that wants chafing…/ Before they wind it in a singer's hair" (ll. 299-300). This

perplexing note of effeminacy in an otherwise masculine moment may merely be an expression of Swinburne's fascination with androgyny as an aesthetic expression.[56] Gitter reads Swinburne's passion for the phallic women as just such a manifestation. "[T]he Medusa is beautiful [because]…at her most potent she is no longer a woman. Her hair-serpents are not symbolically phallic but actually so: the phallic woman, as Swinburne imagines her, has thus successfully metamorphosed into a hermaphrodite, if not into a boy" (952). Yet the crowned hair adds a suggestion of supremacy and the broken bay leaf a note of violence and disorder at odds with these men's service as God's knights, subservient to God's plan, intimating that there is perhaps more going on here than just the violation of gender definition. McGann's reading of the Medusa as a figure which is "the manifest symbol of the equivalence between the hero and his victim" who "accuses in order to reveal what has been buried away, and thus make possible a new life" is perhaps more apt ("The Beauty of the Medusa" 23). Killed by a mirror, she is herself the mirror in which the hero's delusions are shown to be what they are. It seems that Tannhäuser, whose vision has been clarified by his continued examination of the Medusan Venus, is now in a position to see commonalities between his Christian past and his heretical present; he is opening to the possibility of a monist universe.

The sudden self-awareness that Baudelaire's Valmont takes in stride spins Tannhäuser into a crisis; he has seen his sacred service to his deity devolve into mere violence, and his interaction with his lover evolve into pagan service. Much of the unhappiness Tannhäuser expresses late in his time in the Horsel may be due to the difficulty of finding his place in this new reality. He vacillates between the conditions of decadent sensuality and Christian simplicity sometimes seen as oppositional identities—

Harrison points to a fundamental misunderstanding of medieval history as the source of "Tannhäuser's psychological bifurcation…a mirror of the opposition between poet-lovers and priests, which Swinburne believed prevailed during Tannhäuser's age" (66)—but which may have more to do with the removal of discrete boundaries, as his prayers for escape are expressed in the same terms used to describe that third state that characterizes Venus' fall:

> Ah yet would God this flesh of mine might be
> Where air might wash and long leaves cover me,
> Where tides of grass breaks into foam of flower,
> Or where the wind's feet shine along the sea. (ll. 53-6)

The long leaves, the pairing of grass and flower, even the mention of feet recalls the moment of that first meeting between the knight and the goddess, when she occupied that uncertain condition between field and flower, as though what the knight yearns for is God's permission to lose himself in this new, unbounded, and above all uncertain state. He seeks approval for this new paradigm from an old authority. The juxtaposition in the stanza of grass and flower, products of the land, with foam and tide, attributes of the sea,[57] evokes another illusory space beloved of the tradition of "impossible task" ballads like "Scarborough Fair," "The Elfin Knight," and "The Fairy Knight," in which, in order to obtain the favor of a supernatural beloved, a suitor is set a number of tasks, often including crop cultivation in the space between ocean and strand. Typically, such requests are never performed, and fulfillment of the love affair or seduction is thwarted. As the petitioner and the one setting the impossible task, Tannhäuser's plaint reverses the direction of desire expected by his former role as one of "Christ's choosing"—God is now positioned as a kind of suitor, with the knight the supernatural, and unobtainable, prize. The image may also be read as the desire of the weary soldier for rest, a craving

utterly consistent with the knight's past—to lie as a corpse on the battlefield, to pass beyond the ever-present battle, even if it is a passage into death. Many critics read this as indication of suicidal tendencies; these lines also suggest a craving for an even more ephemeral state than the knight's already-illusory eternity in the Horsel.[58]

The devolution of his sacred service can be marked in the fact that it is not assumption or ascension to Heaven he desires, in spite of the fact he is appealing to God; it does not even seem to be about judgment and condemnation, as his imagery remain resolutely terrestrial and his plaint emphasizes fatigue rather than forgiveness. He seems to be after death for its subsumptive and transformational qualities—like Byron's Don Juan, who must be stripped of the class, nation, language, and gender that define him and his relations to others before he can develop into someone who can truly see, sympathize, and seduce, Tannhäuser seeks the removal of the signifiers that bound his old world in order to find his place in the new one. To invoke Baudrillard's construct of the universe once again, Tannhäuser must reject imaginary constructs of sacred and profane, virtue and vice, in order to operate on the level of truth, the level of seduction. This is not a new idea for Swinburne—the subsumed speaker is a common feature of the work in *Poems and Ballads*, because subsumption is both relieving and revelatory. In "Triumph of Time," for instance, the speaker, like Tannhäuser, blurs the lines between sex and death, searching for integration, not with the earth, but the great maternal sea: "I will go back to the great sweet mother,/ Mother and lover of men, the sea/…Close with her, kiss her and mix her with me" (ll. 257-60). The end goal is rest: "The pulse of war and passion of wonder,/…These things are over , and no more mine" (ll. 361-368.) But such immersion is also key to a certain kind of understanding, as Swinburne's own intellectual process

demonstrated; McGann points out: "He undertook that pursuit [of knowledge] by plunge and engulfment…the near complete disappearance, absorption or extinction, of Romantic subjectivity" ("Swinburne's Radical Artifice" 209). In "Les Noyades," the speaker rejoices in the prospect of Carrier's torture by "wedding," the binding of a man and woman together naked and the drowning of them in the Loire, because death is both fixative and revelatory, smashing the boundaries and revealing all aspects of love to the lover:

> For the Loire would have driven us down to the sea,
> And the sea would have pitched us from shoal to shoal;
> And I should have held you, and you held me,
> As flesh holds flesh, and the soul the soul…
>
> But you would have felt my soul in a kiss,
> And known that once if I loved you well;
> And I would have given my soul for this
> To burn forever in burning hell. (ll. 69-80)

Tannhäuser also seeks revelation through a loss of structure, as breaking of boundaries, but he is not quite ready; he still speaks in terms appropriate to his Christian existence, as "my body broken as a turning wheel" (l. 63) uses a simile that implies punishment and death upon a cartwheel, in the manner of Roman murderers and Christian martyrs. But the use of the term "turning," rather than "breaking," suggests an alternate reading of his desire as one for incorporation into a natural and eternally cycling system, seduction's passage of power from agent to object to agent again, which is also shown in his request "that stems and roots were bred/ Out of my weary body" (ll. 57-8) and "my blood were dew to feed the grass" (l. 61). The idea of weariness is reiterated, blurring the lines between death and repose, in the imposition of sleep's seal and the unuttered exclamation "Alas," a protest of fatigue.[59] As Gary Waite points out, in German myth the Venusberg

is a remnant of a belief in a soldier's afterlife, a place where the soul goes when it cannot go to Heaven or Hell. In Christian terms, this is Purgatory, but in pagan terms its analogue is Avalon, where heroes wait and rest until they are again required to fight, thus participating in a cycle of renewal more in line with Tannhäuser's militaristic past than the naturalistic imagery at first suggests.[60] In any case, there is a sense of potential return to the world, as if whatever understanding is gained from the dissolution of boundaries and the subsumption of the lover into the beloved is not wasted in death, but merely held awaiting transfer or transformation. In Tannhäuser's prayers, he exists upon the earth as he lays on Venus' body, craving some means—a response, an aperture, the beneficence of God—by which the boundaries between the two might be dissolved, they become one, and he can find some peace. It is not boredom, fear of eternity, or repugnance at his sins which will drive the knight from the cavern before his time; it is the desire for belonging, thwarted by an as-yet incomplete rejection of the signifiers that define him.

Sadly, peace is no longer a possibility; subsumption has already happened. However, since Tannhäuser's transition is not marked by the dramatic events found in other recreations—Juan's experience with war or Valmont's loss of Tourvel—he is slow to recognize the change. The elision that life in the Horsel has been training Tannhäuser to perform creeps into in the language of the knight's prayer, coloring the reader's understanding of his terms and leading the reader to the realization the knight himself has not yet had:

> …that love were as a flower or flame,
> That life were as the naming of a name,
> That death were not more pitiful than desire,
> That these things were not one thing and the same! (ll. 65-9)

The stanza opens with Tannhäuser tidily bundling disparate concepts as if creating a taxonomy of the ineffable.[61] Love equates to both the fertility of the flower and the destructiveness of fire, but is distinct from life, which is made an analogue to identity (the division of one thing from another through the convention of language). Desire and death, though they may constitute individual categories, share positions on the continuum of tragedy; desire, Tannhäuser seems to feel, should be rated the more severe, possibly because it lasts longer. The last line then undermines all previous attempts at the imposition of order by wishing for a world where such distinctions could be made. This point that love, life, desire, and death are all the same (as well as, presumably, flowers, flames, and names) signifies that Tannhäuser's thinking is now ineradicably tainted by that between-state; the literal reader of God's directives has become the critical reader of connotative similarities, and he can never again live in that world of order and blind adherence. Neither can the reader, who has been tidily confined in the space behind Tannhäuser's eyes for the entirety of the intellectual transformation. This is not to say that knight—or the reader, for that matter—does not continue to crave its clarity; Tannhäuser abandons the Horsel, rejecting the seductive lessons of Venus, driven to Rome in a final, futile attempt to revalidate the comfortable binaries of his Christian existence.

The pilgrimage to Rome serves a test of the new mindset that has been forced upon both knight and reader, as here a challenging viewpoint—that of the Pope—is finally introduced. Unfortunately, Tannhäuser is already well past the point of being able to accept absolution in good faith. Faced again with the kind of choices he made as a knight of God, he would no longer be in a position to distinguish enemy from friend so

definitively, because he has already learned to recognize that commonality in apparent opposites—life and death, love and desire, beauty and sin—that lays the groundwork for empathy. He finds himself well outside the pale in religious terms. As Swinburne puts in, the tragedy of Tannhäuser's "immortal agony" is that he persists in paradoxical desires: "—believing in Christ and bound to Venus—desirous of penitential pain, and damned to joyless pleasure… The tragic touch of the story is this: that the knight who has renounced Christ believes in him; the lover who has embraced Venus disbelieves in her…Once accept or admit the least admixture of pagan worship, or of modern thought, and the whole story collapses into froth and smoke" ("Notes" 26). Unfortunately, if Tannhäuser has a fatal flaw, it is the inability to let go of obsolete paradigms and understand the present as it is. Swinburne further compares the knight's story to the Biblical parable of the foolish virgins from Matthew 25:1, in which a covey of bridesmaids fail to prepare adequately for the possibility of a bridegroom's delayed arrival. Left in the dark by an insufficiency of lamp oil, they are away searching for light when the wedding starts. When the chosen arrives, they are excluded from the celebration, still unable to see. The parallels to the Tannhäuser tradition, as well as the source of the pervasive image of blindness in "Laus Veneris," are clear—the knight's primary anxiety is the fear of being excluded from the Second Coming for lack of foresight, just as the bridesmaids are excluded from the wedding; his pilgrimage to Rome seems meant to precipitate a judgment he might otherwise miss. What is not clear in Swinburne's commentary is whether this analogy is meant to apply to the damned knight of the Tannhäuser tradition, or the devotee of Venus in Swinburne's version. Is a collapse into froth and smoke the whole point?

As with Byron's Don Juan, clutching at the ghost of the Black Friar but feeling only a very human duchess, for Tannhäuser that judgment never comes. The trip to Rome reveals the knight's service to a supernatural power to be merely slavery to a very terrestrial dogma. The reader cannot help but be aware of the limited vision and value of God's vicar—the Pope is said to offer denial of absolution in a voice like "a great cry out of hell" (l. 367), suggestive of the venality of his motivations, and the subsequent blooming of the staff underscores his fallibility. But such anticlericalist sentiment is not new in the Tannhäuser tradition; Claude Simpson goes so far as to try to name the particular pope that would have excited such ire.[62] The novel addition to Swinburne's re-creation is the knight's skepticism. The poem explains Tannhäuser's hasty retreat, not as evidence of his sense of unworthiness, but as a feature of a pervasive nihilism: "Yea, what if the dried up stems wax red and green,/Shall that thing be which is not nor has been?" (ll. 373-4). The knight no longer operates in a world where the miracle matters; he has rejected the paradigm of his religion the same way Valmont rejected the paradigm of his association with Merteuil. A reader who has hung on through the hundreds of stanzas of uncertainty in "Laus Veneris" should not be surprised, at this point, to find that the "thing" in these lines has no clear referent; the context, however, is suggestive: candidates for the thing that would not be called into existence even by such a miracle include forgiveness, worthiness, virtue… perhaps even God himself.

Again, the evidence of transformation at issue is not the depth or object of knight's questioning, but *that he questions at all*—like Don Juan questioning the religious validity and supernatural origins of the Black Friar or Valmont questioning his own libertine philosophy after the death of Tourvel, the knight finally has sufficient

experience to challenge received notions about the morality of his purpose. He is no longer the singing enforcer, deluding himself about the clarity of his perception and the virtue of his service; he now sees and comprehends, even when the view is unpleasant. Evidently, this ability is the key to his transformation, as the final few stanzas document his reconciliation with his frailties in an undefined world, linking understanding, sight, and an unexpectedly responsive Venus in syntax in which all uncertainties have been resolved. Tannhäuser can accept a future damnation because of the knowledge to which he has become privy; the virtuous, he is quick to point out, have no such understanding even in heaven:

> Ah love, there is no better life than this…/
> Yea these that know not, shall they have such bliss/
> High up in barren heaven before his face/
> As we twain in the heavy-hearted place… (ll. 409-414)

Heaven, it seems, is no less infertile than the "dry desire" of the Horsel; God and man are no less blind than the blinking knight, who, it turns out, can already see the only important thing he needed to see—the truth in his present circumstance. Though Swinburne characterizes the knight's future as "abiding the day of his judgment in weariness and sorrow and fear" ("Notes" 27), Tannhäuser indicates that he has forgotten such concerns (l. 401). Thomas Brennan reads this attack of amnesia as an effect related to the goddess' seductiveness because it occurs immediately after Venus kisses the knight in welcome, her only act in the entire poem (269). Yet the change in emphasis occurs even before the kiss; the last indication of fatigue before the moment of forgetting (l. 385) is located between a stanza contemplating the fragmentation of both body and soul—"nothing whole therein but love" (l. 384)—and one relating the soul and the beloved—"my own soul's heart" (l. 387). He receives his kiss, and then his tone turns triumphant in

its acquisition, at last, of the beloved: "…I hold thee with my hand,/ I let mine eyes have all their will of thee,/ I seal myself upon thee with my might…" (ll. 419-21). The knight has found the way in, the sexual subsumption he craves. He has a suitable outlet for his physical intensity. He has found the aperture he was looking for into that "between" state that permits him finally to grasp Venus, and permits her to clasp him back. As Harrison writes, "…out of Tannhäuser's convoluted self-analysis, his analysis of love, his retrospection, and his resignation to the eventual torments of Hell he is bound to suffer, evolves Blakean 'progress': a powerful affirmation of eros that for Tannhäuser constitutes a psychological apocalypse" (60). Harrison's argument is invested in seeing "Laus Veneris" as a poem only about the psychology of love, an interpretation that may limit the impact of Tannhäuser's transformed worldview; it is clear, however, that the knight has become the Romantic hero that can gaze into the eyes of the Medusa and survive.

The Lesson

In the classical tradition, man does not get to look upon a god and live—no matter how intimate the relationship otherwise. Actaeon sees Artemis in her bath, and is torn apart by his own hounds. The all-powerful Zeus cultivates a variety of cunning impersonations for the seduction of mortals, coming to Antiope as a satyr, to Ganymede as an eagle, to Europa as a bull, to Danae as a shower of gold, and to Alcmene as her own husband. When he is tricked into showing Semele his true aspect, his divinity, tragedy strikes—she dies instantly, and he is forced to save their unborn child, that twice-born god Dionysus, by cutting it from her corpse and bringing it to term in a cavity in his own thigh. So when Swinburne ends "Laus Veneris" with Tannhäuser looking upon a revived

goddess now equally conscious of him, the poet is signaling not just a narrative recursion, the return of the failed hero, but a transformation, the hero ascending to a state of grace—just a different kind than the knight had, as a Christian, expected. Like Ganymede, plucked from the mortal world to be the cupbearer to the gods, this new Tannhäuser gets to rub shoulders with divinity in the here-and-now, not after some promised last trump. The path to his transcendence—the true pilgrimage, in Swinburne's version of the tale—has been his sojourn in the Horsel, a traditional venue drastically redecorated to suit a philosophical purpose. Though it is a pornotopia, to borrow Marcus' term, in the sense that it is an enclosed space, outside of the world as we know it, exempt from most considerations of time, and the host to a juxtaposition of bodies, it does not fulfill one critical criterion: the act repeated insatiably for the education of both the knight and the reader is not sex, it is doubt. Sex, after all, does not happen within the narrative, although it may have happened before it; doubt and confusion, on the other hand, inhabit every line. Like the poem itself, the sojourn in the Horsel is designed to encourage uncertainty—ambiguity in observation, qualms about memory, distrust of beliefs—because uncertainty promotes questioning and questioning results in thought. Hyder considers the judgment of this as a philosophic poem to be evidence of "ineptitude" (*Swinburne's Literary Career* 58), but I disagree; few other judgments seem possible of a narrative that exists almost entirely in a man's head.

Thus Swinburne's process with this poem was to take the gap in the center of the *Tannhäuserleid* and turn it into a Carrollian rabbit hole into which the reader falls, like Alice; only instead of Wonderland the rabbit hole leads to a prison within the perspective of a single subjectivity that happens to be on an existential quest in fantastical

circumstances. The reader is forced into intimate relations with that subjectivity by the problems of identity and definition with which the poem opens—Tannhäuser's confused experience of the Horsel is mirrored by the reader's confused experience with the shifting syntax and modifiers of the poem; his questions about who and what he is are echoed in the reader's struggles to recognize and place the character. The reader is carried along on a journey of development back and forth through the libertine's own history, a faithful, moral, and above all Christian past, which is revealed to be every bit as bizarre to Tannhäuser—and the reader—as pirate islands and Sultan's harems are to Don Juan. Locked in the space behind the knight's eyes, trapped in an environment of doubt so pervasive even the fundamentals of syntax are uncertain, the reader is subjected to a barrage of imagery, derived from both memory and present experience, in which the sure and certain binaries of a moral Christian's experience are examined, questioned, dissolved, and turned into some third state. Having ridden postilion through this long night of the pilgrim's soul, the reader is then taken up and out into the world in time to see that the contemporary Christian world is no less unsympathetic, self-justifying, and petty than that of Tannhäuser's reconstruction. Finally, the knight and the reader retreat back into the world of doubt to find that profane love has accomplished what sacred could not, accessing the godhead in the form of the beloved. "Laus Veneris" demonstrates that the divine is accessible, not through unquestioning faith in received wisdom, but in rigorous contention with it.

CHAPTER 5

THE INTENTIONAL TOURIST: BEARDSLEY'S *THE STORY OF VENUS AND TANNHÄUSER*

To recap, then, where Byron's re-creation of Don Juan leans heavily on the seductive strategies of disarmament and personalization and Baudelaire's Valmont is crafted almost entirely through enticement, Swinburne instead leverages personalization and control aggressively, using prolonged uncertainty and a highly constrained point of view to force the reader almost immediately into a condition of intimacy and identification with Tannhäuser as he conducts a program of self-analysis so prolonged that his paradigm shifts and he abandons the Christian faith that had previously been his sole guide and moral compass in favor of the more terrestrial influences of Venus-the-lover. In this transition of allegiance from sacred to profane, Swinburne's Tannhäuser presages Beardsley's, although, apart from a shared setting called the Venusberg, the two narratives have little else in common. Instead, Beardsley draws his characterization of the knight from Byron's Don Juan, and the design of Venusberg society from Valmont's milieu. In his illustrated novelization of the Tannhäuser myth, Beardsley deploys all four stages of seduction, but covertly, under the cover of more overt sexuality (one might contend pornography because of its explicitness) than any of the other authors considered here. What he does not do—perhaps because this is the least finished of all the unfinished projects discussed in this argument—is provide a clear statement of his philosophical

aim. Beardsley provides, instead, an experience: a fully fleshed, full-frontal tour of the kingdom of Venus, variously titled "Under the Hill," in its abbreviated release in *The Savoy*, or *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser*, so thickly detailed, so explicit, so at odds with itself—character against character, text against illustration—in its tracing of the adventures of a young knight who abandons the nurturing influence of the Virgin Mary in favor of a rational project of lascivious experience, only to assume the maternal protection of the goddess Venus, that the reader becomes overwhelmed by the excesses of the novel the same way Tannhäuser is overwhelmed by the excesses of the Venusberg. Being overwhelmed is, of course, the point, because it is only in the face of experiences that are too much, too new, or too strange that one abandons one's preconceptions about the world in favor of a more practical deductive philosophy.

Beardsley openly acknowledges the novel's debt to a libertine lineage, comparing his literary efforts obliquely to Byron's (as well as de Molina's) in a May, 1896 letter which comments: "the Juanesque continuation…begins to take form bootifully" (133). The continuation shares a number of key similarities with its predecessors. As with Byron's Don Juan, Beardsley's knight is an innocent embarked upon a journey of experience; here, however, that experience is actively pursued by the hero, rather than thrust upon him by events out of control. Though the novel shares a subject with "Laus Veneris," while Swinburne inserts the reader into the contained space of a single awareness during a single (possible) sex act, Beardsley instead inserts his reader into a contained society engaged in a perpetual public orgy. As with Baudelaire's Valmont, Beardsley's hero is a peerless cultural achievement, but a pinnacle of aesthetic, as opposed to aristocratic, refinement. As a willing exile, social animal, and aesthete,

Beardsley's Tannhäuser has obviously already embarked on a program of self-perfection through excess; the value of commencing such a project appears to be a foregone conclusion in Beardsley's argument. Beardsley's novel is instead a mock-libertine tale, perhaps a mocking one, seemingly critical of the society of excess through which a Valmont or a Dolmancé moves, but perhaps also critical of the kind of libertines that move through it. The text of the novel builds a pocket world of rampant sexuality—passions satisfied so immediately and so often there is no time left for intellectual pursuit, the games of seduction, or the pedagogy of victimizer and victim—and into it interjects a hero who is confident, educated, aspiring, and clearly considers himself to be ready to conquer this new world in the best Don Juan style—though clearly he is not. The surviving illustrations of the novel, on the other hand, build a pocket world of oppression and entrapment—and show how inadequate the characters are to perform in that world, how easily it will break and transform them.

Begun in 1894, when he was still the art editor at *The Yellow Book*, Beardsley's illustrated novel was the first of a number of erotic projects Beardsley would conceive of but never complete. It was a direct response to deficiencies in the Wagner opera; in a letter to F.H. Evans dated June 27 of that year, he damns the performance with faint praise and indicates what might be the beginnings of a new sketch: "*Tannhäuser* [the opera] went very well I thought after the first act…The concert must stand over for a month or so until I can finish a big long thing of the revels in act I of *Tannhäuser*—it will simply astonish everyone I think" (*Letters* 71-2). Whether by "big long thing" he means the novel's story or some sort of panoramic illustration is not clear; if there was an illustration from this period, it did not survive.[63] In October of 1894, he writes that he has

undertaken "a large number of illustrations" for the book, and sets the intended publication date for the following year (*Letters* 76), and in November provides a brief description of one of the drawings: "I am just doing a picture of Venus feeding her pet unicorns which have garlands of roses round their necks" (*Letters* 79). That illustration also did not survive (although it may be telling to compare the roses in that description with a scene in the novel describing Venus, a single unicorn, breakfast buns, and masturbation). That Beardsley's intention is to redress Wagner's interpretation, and that the project is not going well, is made clear in his mention to Raffalovich in May 28, 1895 (well past the time intimated for the novel's release) that "On Friday I am going to hear *Tannhäuser*. I look forward to it with mixed pleasure for it puts me most terribly out of conceit with my own little variations on the same theme" (*Letters* 88). This would have been just after Beardsley was removed from his position with *The Yellow Book* on the coattails of the Wilde conviction, and at the very beginnings of a carefully cultivated relationship with the publisher Leonard Smithers, described by the editors of the *Letters* as "a man of audacious originality, an utterly unbusinesslike enthusiasm for literature and art, and no morals" (95). Beardsley's disinclination to discuss his ongoing projects in any depth in his letters makes it difficult to tell if his original conception for *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser* was to be as verbally erotic and visually tame as the final product, or if the transition from Lane to Smithers as publisher encouraged the artist to liven the narrative up to suit Smithers' taste. It is clear, however, that at least five drawings specifically for the text were completed—the frontispiece, *Venus between the Terminal Gods*; *The Abbé*, also known as *The Chevalier Tannhäuser*, an illustration of the singing knight; *The Toilet of Helen (Venus); The Fruit Bearer*; and *The Bacchanals of Sporion*,

an illustration which was apparently finished, damaged, and begun again, but not completed.[64] Though he indicates continuation of the project to Smithers in May, 1896, after the publication of "Under the Hill" in *The Savoy*, Beardsley becomes increasingly distracted by other projects, including the highly explicit illustrations for an edition of the *Lysistrata*. A proposed larger version of *The Bacchanals* gets a mention in October, 1896 (*Letters* 188), but after that no more is said of Venus or Tannhäuser until Beardsley proposes a new story in November, 1897 (*Letters* 385). George Trail argues this abandonment of the original text is indicative of the artist's attempt to relegate pornography and favor art, the expurgated version of the story being the art (17). However, Trail takes into account neither Beardsley's concomitant plans for other explicit projects, nor his frenzied taste for novelty in both project and technique, which suggest that boredom, not shame, drove Beardsley on to other endeavors. Though quite ill at this point, in consequence of which many of his schemes go unfinished, Beardsley plans for both an illustrated translation of *Dangerous Liaisons* and an illustrated edition of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, and his interest in libertinism persists throughout the year, in spite of his Catholic conversion. Repudiation of his subject matter occurs at the very last minute; just before his death in March, 1898, he exhorts Smithers to destroy "all obscene drawings," citing the *Lysistrata* particularly, but not mentioning the Tannhäuser. Despite its overt and varied sexual proclivities, Beardsley's Venusberg appears to escape its creator's rue (*Letters* 439), suggesting that, although the book is stuffed full of explicit sexual description, at least in its early chapters, the author never really considers it obscene, or at least not as obscene as the phallocentric work done for the *Lysistrata*.

Perhaps, for Beardsley, the explicitness is intended to be the vehicle rather than the destination, the first experiments along the knight's path to higher, better ideals.

Beardsley's comparison of Tannhäuser and Don Juan is apt because Beardsley's Tannhäuser has been remodeled as thoroughly as Byron's Don Juan, with the same air of blithe ignorance and practical inadequacy. Beardsley quite literally disarms Tannhäuser—depriving Tannhäuser the knight of his association with warfare and Tannhäuser the singer of his mastery of music. Where Tieck and Swinburne write a knight, Beardsley writes a courtier[65]; where Wagner writes a master singer, Beardsley writes a well-read aesthete with a lute he never plays. Beardsley's hero retains power only in one key aspect—he is an active seeker after knowledge. Where the entire tradition writes an abductee, Beardsley instead writes an aspirant, a student of aesthetic theory in a quest for a venue to perform what he knows. Much is made in the opening chapter of his previously acquired appreciation of form and subtlety: the "labored niceness" of his clothing is maintained by checking "point to point of a precise toilet"; the tassel of his stick is carefully rearranged; he enters the Venusberg at what he judges is the "delicious moment" (22). The implication is that Tannhäuser, as a dandy and perhaps as a performer, has achieved a degree of proficiency. While the illustration of Tannhäuser at the gate reinforces this preoccupation with embellishment—curled hair, feathered hat, embroidered muff, ribbons, sashes, peculiar pendants—it also hints at neophytism by revealing just how young and girlish Tannhäuser is; behind the texture and movement and puffery of an *incroyable* is a knock-kneed, large-hipped, sweet-faced boy, a pretty rarity in Beardsley's usual cast of monsters.[66] So although clearly far more self-possessed at the beginning of the journey than Byron's hero—this Tannhäuser would not waste time

contemplating astronomy in the presence of a pretty girl, though he might well be distracted by his own cuffs—it is questionable whether that poise will render him any more prepared for the world under the hill than Don Juan was for the world outside Spain.

The kingdom under the hill is characterized by excess but also by isolation. Isolation is a persistent theme in Beardsley's pen-and-ink work from the very beginning of his career, though at the time of transition to *The Savoy*, he had developed new techniques for expressing it. "Under the Hill" marks a transition from the single, sinuous line of *Salome*, crossing the page to connect figures in a scene at the same time as it established them as discrete forms, and the stark two-tone contrasts of the *Yellow Book*, which set off certain figures in a blaze of white against a shadowy background of others, to a far more complicated, textured style whose overall effect is one of half-tones. By filling his backgrounds with vegetation and his foregrounds with elaborately patterned fabric in an eighteenth-century mode, Beardsley emphasizes the way each static figure is trapped in, and about to be overwhelmed by, the scene he or she occupies.[67] *The Chevalier Tannhäuser* illustration shows the effeminate knight self-consciously posed against the Venusberg gatepost, with an emphatically textured garden just behind him. The vegetation is busy with large blooms, taller than a man and sexualized; at least one moth sports a woman's lower extremities. The scale of the garden suggests that the knight may not be up to the task—not only is he smaller than both the vegetation and the gate, he is also not so much dressed as puffed up, in a cloak and trousers of such a pronounced, ridged nap that the weight of the line causes his body to fade into the darkness of the undergrowth.[68] Only his white face, buoyed up by the elaborate bow and

ruching of what is presumably a linen cravat, save him from near invisibility. The heavy inking and busy texture of the Venusberg gardens have all but consumed him, even before he has stepped over the threshold, suggesting that the Venusberg itself is poised to eat him alive—if one finds oneself inadequate to the front door, what hope does on have inside? The gatepost at the knight's right hand bounds the left side of the image; though incised with strong diagonals and encircled by vines that add to the heavy textures in the illustration, it appears to be architecturally erect rather than symbolically phallic, robbing the scene of even a trace of dominating masculinity. Compare this to Swinburne's account of Tannhäuser's entry into the Venusberg, in pursuit of a fleeing, naked, possibly floating goddess; Beardsley's knight is so bound up in textures and surfaces that the kind of activity needed to dominate, in the traditional libertine manner, is impossible. He suffers from chronic aesthetic passivity. There is no corresponding gatepost on Tannhäuser's left, but the knight is nonetheless enclosed, standing in the only clear patch of lawn, with the flowers and the forest crowded in close ranks behind. A break in the trees showing tiny patch of sky above his right shoulder is the sole respite from the pervasive texture and overwhelming sense of enclosure. Chris Snodgrass argues that such a feeling of entrapment is a pervasive theme throughout Beardsley's visual work, pointing to the emblem for *Morte d'Arthur*, with its cramped arrangement of Merlin's body into a circle almost too small for it, as evidence (138). However, he reads the texture as an antidote, rather than a contributor, to that entrapment, postulating the circumstances of Beardsley's illness as the motivator: "His relentless desire to fill (even overfill) vacant space ironically highlights the Janus-faced impulses in his art—a desire to fill and presumably redeem the 'emptiness' that simultaneously signifies the

smothering imprisonment he felt" (142). Yet in this illustration, rather than ameliorating the sense of confinement, the texture helps creates it, forming a tight little world of irritated line with only the tiniest avenue of escape, a vanishing point, upon which the knight has turned his back. The drawing thus reinforces the knight's voluntary submission to the conditions of entrapment and frenetic energy of the Venusberg, but it also points out, paradoxically, that the vacant space, the means of escaping entrapment, persists regardless of his rejection, the same way God's love, shown by the blooming staff in the Wagner opera, persists in spite of the knight's failure to recognize it. If, on the other hand, Snodgrass' interpretation of the texture is true, and redemption for Beardsley is a product of the filling of space, then this illustration may be intended to foreshadow the outcome of the knight's pilgrimage through the Venusberg and on to the Vatican. Redemption would be an inevitable product of the experience, because sexual intercourse, in its most basic terms, is about filling space—a phallus in an orifice, a fetus in a womb. If the texture, so pervasive in the drawings, that creates a sense of confinement is the mechanism by which the confinement is given value, then, by analogy, the intercourse, so pervasive in the text, that creates the sin may be the mechanism needed to restore its virtue. The illustration thus may be seen to both underscore the risk Tannhäuser is taking by entering the mad world under the hill, and reinforce the value of Tannhäuser's elective confinement there; the experience may temper and improve him, and the world above that he abandoned will still be there when he is done.

The text makes it clear the knight is at least nominally aware of both the risks and the rewards of his pilgrimage; this may be what will ultimately keep him from being

consumed by the frenzy. He seeks out the hill of Venus voluntarily, not just for the song, the seductiveness of which is acknowledged only once, in a single sentence in the opening chapter when he plays along with it, but for the goddess herself. He is aware that to enter the grotto is to "slip into exile" (21)—to cross a boundary, to abandon one world, at least temporarily, for another—but he times the moment carefully, for best effect, and "slip into" is a verb phrase which suggest the gentlest of voluntary actions—like changing one's clothes or retiring to bed. His general goodbye to the world consigns it to God ("adieu") with "an inclusive gesture," perhaps a benediction, and his particular farewell singles out the Virgin (22), so while this Tannhäuser story, like its predecessors, also includes the virtues and the passions figured by Mary and Venus, respectively, there is no sense of a contest between them for the chevalier's soul. Tannhäuser willingly relinquishes the world, religion, and virtue in favor of willing participation in whatever experience the Venusberg has to offer—he is a voluntary student of experience, intentionally pursued.

Venus' subjects delight in both sexual experience and social performance, and their world is designed for efficient enactment of both. As with Swinburne's treatment in "Laus Veneris," and in line with the tradition laid out by Philip Barto, Beardsley's Venusberg is at least partly subterranean, but it is far more a palace, or an entertainment complex, than the crypt where Swinburne houses his sleeping Venus or the grotto in which Wagner's pagans perform their ballet. Beardsley's construction is more elaborate, containing not just rooms but also myriad structures for entertainment, including terraces, gardens, stables, casinos, theatres, and opera houses. The Venusberg is enclosed, but apparently not secret, for Tannhäuser is able to ride directly up to the entrance without

searching. The landscape recalls Barthes' requirement for a closed libertine world, although here the manipulation of reality is the province of a whole libertine society rather than an individual seducer; it also fits the criteria for a pornotopia perfectly— the placement of the gate suggests the arrangement of female genitalia, with its pair of pillars in a jungle "dripping with odors" surrounding a "pretty portal" or a "cave" (21), and if there is an outside world from which Tannhäuser journeys, it is only acknowledged once, in the farewell, and only in the most general of terms.[69] Each location within the hill appears to have its own dedicated sexual activity; to travel from room to room is to venture from practice to practice. De la Pine's studio offers a venue for transvestitism; the casino showcases bestiality (or perhaps pony play) at its game tables and androgyny on its stages. The unicorn's stable acts as the background for habitual masturbation. The bath provides room for homosexual pedophilia. In Venus's closet, the goddess performs her toilette for the benefit of the voyeurs and dispenses objects for the benefit of the fetishists, as when "Florizel snatches as usual a slipper…and fitted the foot over his penis" (31). Indeed, the population of the Venusberg all but consumes their queen, if the following summary of obsessions is to be believed:

> Everything she wore had its lover. Heavens! how her handkerchiefs were filched, her stockings stolen! Daily, what intrigues, what countless ruses to possess her merest frippery! Every scrap of her body was adored. Never, for Savaral, could her ear yield sufficient wax! Never, for Pradon, could she spit prodigally enough! And Saphius found a month an interminable time. (40)

Every bit of Venus' effluvia is said to be desirable; therefore, she must constantly be giving of herself (every time she gets dressed, spits, blows her nose, or has a bath) in order to satisfy their fetishistic cravings. There is no function, no location, no moment that she can hope to be private. There is no function, no location, no moment where any

member of the Venusberg is private. They perform their proclivities constantly and publicly. A tour of the kingdom, which is what Tannhäuser is getting in the early part of the novel, is thus simultaneously a program of experiences—the continual consumption of novel sensations—and performances—sex as entertainment that will serve as a proving ground for his decadent beliefs.

The self-conscious description of Tannhäuser's entrance into the Venusberg suggests that he believes he is capable of fitting in to the perpetual show that is the Venusberg. He is wrong. Tannhäuser's particular Aesthetic pose is of the kind usually termed "decadent" because it holds certain theoretical conceptions of the past that privilege the art and culture of dead societies; the Venusberg, as a dead society preserved like a bug in amber, would seem to him an ideal playground. But his allusive understanding of the past is fundamentally irreconcilable with the philosophy of the Venusberg, pointing to the inherent incompatibility between a decadent interest in libertine matters and the libertine matter itself. The former is a preoccupation with past practice, a kind of nostalgia for the obsolete; the latter is an interest in current practice, the stratagems and behavior that fulfill the libertine's present desires and future intentions. The former has no stakes at all, and suffers no penalty for inaccuracy or inadequacy; the latter faces significant social penalties for failure, ranging from excommunication to damnation, embarrassment to exile. Tannhäuser is capable of contemplating past, present, and future (Wagner, the *Romaunt de la Rose*, Lady Delaware's art collection, St. Rose of Lima, Racine, and a pair of blonde trousers, not yet commissioned) all before breakfast because such allusion is never realized as practice, and thus is, for him, an intellectual end in itself. The Venusberg, instead, transforms

everything into practice. Its artistic interests, as shown by performances of a de Bergerac rewrite and Rossini's setting for *Stabat Mater*, a standard liturgical text, are apparently quite limited—two performances and the work of the painter de la Pine—and familiar, because, in the Venusberg, art is the means and sex is the end. Art is just another excuse, like gambling or gardens or dinner, for sexual performance, as when the orchestra rises up during a concert and rapes the conductor. Venusberg is more interested, it turns out, in itself than in art. So while, as Matthew Potolsky argues in *The Decadent Republic of Letters*, the peculiar allusiveness of the character of Tannhäuser and the voice of the narrator may both speak to, and by extension construct, a readership of decadent insiders who would recognize all such allusions (and find themselves gently flattered, kindly disposed, and inclined to identify with the sophistication of both the knight and the narrator—seduced by strategies of personalization)—that allusiveness does not, in any way, communicate itself to the Venusberg. The society under the hill sets itself apart from both knight and reader by the fact of its libertine practice; its affair with the past is tangible, born of exile and isolation. It does not pose itself decadently; it performs its past as present. For Tannhäuser and the narrator, these constant allusions to the artistic past are, to borrow Potolsky's terms, "encomium, tribute, and eulogy" (*Decadent Republic* 7). To the people of the Venusberg, they are current culture, practical and real—the entertainment after dinner. For Tannhäuser and the narrator, these allusions may be an attempt to illustrate, as Emma Sutton argues, the "crucial distinction between consumerism and connoisseurship," ironically exposing the retail foundations upon which Aesthetic principles of beauty were based (140); for the people of the Venusberg, consumption is all and connoisseurship is, at best, a trivial by-product. Tannhäuser must

practice his decadent poses in the mirror alone simply because they are, for him, poses rather than practices. To come to the Venusberg is to test his theories in a practical venue, the way a historian might take advantage of the invention of the time machine. Untested, those theories count for little.

Fortunately, every scene is overloaded with opportunities for consumption and display, giving the knight ample opportunity to participate in the twin indulgences of the Venusberg on an excessive scale. The "four hundred couches" of the dinnertime orgy suggest both sybaritic leisure in the Roman manner, and the kind of pack-them-in mentality normally reserved for sporting events and rock concerts (35). Orgy participants consume each other twice, first visually and then, after the meal, sexually. Artifice is the catch of the day, and the text spends two full pages barraging the reader with detail of the diners' attention-seeking strategies, yet curiously this scene is never illustrated: "dresses of ostrich feathers curling inwards," "delightful little mustaches dyed in purples and bright greens," and "black silhouettes painted upon the legs…like a sumptuous bruise" (38). Diners consume the meal twice as well, both orally and aurally; the menu is composed of eleven elaborate courses whose titles are themselves provocative—carp's tongue ragout, pâté of goose thighs, pigeon at the turning point, apple tart Lucy Waters[70]—foreshadowing the consumption of bodies to follow. Even the after-dinner sex privileges the mouth: "Belamour pretended to be a dog…biting and barking and licking"; Venus bites, finding Tannhäuser's "skin at once firm and yielding, seeming to those exquisite little teeth of hers, the most incomparable pasture"; Mrs. Marsuple "refused to be quiet at all until she had had a mouthful of the Chevalier" (41-2). These alimentary metaphors suggest the kind of threat this Venusberg experience poses to the effeminate

aesthete we see in the garden—the potential for conversion, to be broken down, through repeated and voluntary morseling out, and transformed by a kind of social digestion, into something else entirely.

Dinnertime conversation provides the opportunity to perform another kind of digestion, the chewing over of fresh scandal. The range and intimacy of the knowledge indicate the kind of society the Venusberg is: cosmopolitan yet homogenous, insular, and very, very small. A host of sexual follies are picked over:

> The infidelities of Cerise, the difficulties of Brancas, Sarmean's caprices that morning in the lily garden, Thorilliere's declining strength, Astarte's affection for Roseola, Felix's impossible member, Cathelin's passion for Sulpilia's poodle, Sola's passion for herself, the nasty bite that Marisca gave Chloe, the *épilatiere* of Pulex, Cyril's diseases, Butor's illness, Maryx's tiny cemetery, Lesbia's profound fourth letter, and a thousand amatory follies of the day were discussed. (26)

In this cascade of gossip, fully half the topics under discussion have to do with medical matters—damage, disease, abnormal physiology, and the inability to perform. The remainder chronicles a range of what are, in nineteenth-century terms, deviant behaviors, from the promiscuity implied by the nonspecific "infidelities" to lesbianism, onanism, and bestiality.[71] No family names or identifiers are used. The intimation is that the individuals discussed are as well known to the narrator—and by extension the reader—as they are to the scandalmonger and his or her audience.[72] The first sentence alone features names that are French, Portuguese, Georgian, French again, a Greek version of Mesopotamian, neo-Latin, proper Latin, French a third time… suggesting that Venus's coteries is drawn, not just from ancient Rome, but from across the world.[73] The lack of family names also suggests that the Venusberg is relatively free of social stratification—these people can speak indiscreetly about each other, too each other, because they are all peers. Even though there are gardens and stables and kitchens, there do not seem to be

gardeners, stable hands, or kitchen maids. (The barber who shaves Tannhäuser in the morning and the boys who bring him his towels are the closest thing to an underclass that the text manifests.) In effect, Venus rules a kingdom much like a salon writ large, populated almost entirely by a single class of accomplished, experienced individuals unencumbered by the responsibilities of family, money, or profession. Her subjects even dress like continental aristocrats, as *The Toilet of Venus* shows.[74]

Their language is that of the salon as well. When Potolsky terms the language of the text "mock-precious idiom" ("Decadent Counterpublic" 17), he aligns it with the fashion for *préciosité* found in the seventeenth century *salons* of the Marquise de Rambouillet and her adherents, a kind of insider discourse so particular in its refinement that it led to the publication of a dictionary of idiom by Antoine de Somaize, and so exclusive in its application that it prompted a snide one-act play by Molière.[75] Its use in the Venusberg does a great deal to situate that society ideologically. Philosophically, in its valorization of the feminine and emphasis on refinement and correctness, the discourse of the *précieuses*—and by extension that of the society of the Venusberg—can be seen as an evolution of the courtly ethos that underpins the more traditional versions of the Tannhäuser tale, a way of validating what might otherwise be gratuitous promiscuity and malicious social discourse. Historically, by invoking the memory of a social circle in retreat from the dodgy politics of the French court, it may recast the Venusberg's pagan exile as a refuge for delicate, intellectual, and perhaps countercultural sensibilities from a harsh political reality.[76] It also points up the similarities between the Venusberg's populace and the French aristocracy, a social class decimated by revolution expressly because of its excesses, suggesting that, while the Venusberg's tendency to

excess may provide fertile ground for transformation, such tendency is a means, not an end. Those for whom it is an end themselves are ended, messily. In any case, the language irritates some critics enormously; they find the excesses of the language in Beardsley nearly as objectionable as the graphic representation of the sex, perhaps it the kind of discourse that openly excludes, and they have been alienated by it; it is a language that makes a performance of its secrets.[77] For instance, the reader watches the Venusberg residents speak, but seldom hears them:

> Mrs. Marsuple's voice was full of salacious unction; she had terrible little gestures with the hands, strange movements with the shoulders, a short respiration that made surprising wrinkles in the bodice, a corrupt skin…The talk that passed between Mrs. Marsuple and her mistress was of that excellent kind that passes between old friends, a perfect understanding giving to scraps of phrases their full meaning, and to the merest reference a point. (28)

The passage lingers on Mrs. Marsuple's movements almost like a stage direction; it does not, however, tell the reader what she said, only that there was a "perfect understanding" to which the reader is not privy. As with the dinnertime conversation, there is a sense that the narrator is mediating between the residents of the Venusberg and the reader, interpreting their discourse for an unfamiliar audience. There are even two moments when the narrative, generally so accustomed to at least the illusion of explicitness, becomes unexpectedly dumb. Once, in describing Venus, the narrator cites an "enforced silence," which prevents the relation of certain descriptive details of her form (although the reader has just been given the measurement of her shin bone) and thus makes any attempt at general description flawed and pointless (30). Once, during the otherwise exhaustively detailed after-dinner orgy, the narrator suddenly self-censors (or perhaps just runs out of ideas) about "what occurred round table 15" for unspecified "deplorable reasons" (41). On one hand, these gaps are enticing, leaving the reader free to fill in such

details as personal predilection dictates regarding both the looks of the heroine and the orgiastic activities of her retinue; on the other hand, they briefly reveal the contours of a controlling hand underneath what otherwise appears to be an objectively explicit, "warts-and-all" narrative. The control is not as apparent as in Swinburne. The reader is not trapped and held; mostly, the reader is guided forward, but in these two instances, the reader is briefly pulled back. The effect is an instant of alienation; like the tendency toward *préciosité*, these are a reminder of the reader's place (a place shared with Tannhäuser) as someone who, touring this world of display and consumption, is welcome to sample its delights, but not to stay.

Like *préciosité* , this world under the hill of rampant consumption and carefully modulated display valorizes the feminine. The Venusberg is, after all, run by a woman, and as the court of adherents exiled with their goddess, her role would be as both its ultimate authority and its center of attention. One would expect Venus to exercise her absolute and supernatural powers as a dominant player in the games of her kingdom: a sadist, perhaps, like the pagan goddess Swinburne describes, or a manipulator of men, the original predatory female. Yet, in contrast to the vigorous, self-serving, secretive, just-slightly-alienating society of the Venusberg, Beardsley writes its queen as a deeply sympathetic, largely selfless, sweet-tempered child—disarmed, and disarming, not unlike Tannhäuser himself. She is complimentary to her hairdresser, apologetic to Mrs. Marsuple, tolerant of the constant attendance of her coterie, generous with both her possession and her bodily emissions in satisfaction of various fetishes. When illustrated in *The Toilette of Venus*, she appears partially clothed but not lasciviously so, bare-breasted but with a flounced wrap covering shoulders and lap that mutes the seductive

effect and turns her into the picture of a bride, or perhaps a nursing mother.[78] Her voluntary submission is underscored by the feeling of confinement, both by her subjects and the room itself—she is held down by her hairdresser with a hand on her lap and one on her head, and bounded on all sides by attendants or furniture. While Snodgrass finds that the monstrosity of the attendants taints the beauty of the goddess, contending that being "compositionally framed and 'grounded' by hideous grotesques …seriously undercuts that beauty and elegance…" implying that Venus and her people are cut from the same terrible cloth (168), these monstrosities are, for Beardsley, quite tame when compared to the bare genitals and misshapen heads of *Enter Herodias,* the Japonesque grimaces and twisted embryos of *Dreams for Lucian's Strange History,* or the menagerie of bald-headed horrors found in *Lucian's Strange Creatures*.[79] The overall tone of the illustration may be baroque and just a touch excessive in its texture (although not as excessive as the illustration of Tannhäuser in the garden), but, outside of Mrs. Marsuple and a table with breasts, it lacks the overt horribleness found in much of Beardsley's other work, suggesting that Venus herself, in spite of her sexualized identity, is not meant to be just another of his grotesques. She is the queen of this kingdom, but also its hostage. In *Venus between Terminal Gods*, the garden of texture that enfolded Tannhäuser becomes a cage of treillage that contains Venus. She is enclosed completely, positioned slightly behind the two statues of satyrs whose antlers entwine to form a roof, and slightly in front of the posts whose vines entwine to hold her crown a little above her head. Her movements appear constrained, and her sovereignty, as figured in the crown, seems bestowed and controlled by external powers. Her pose is patient but morose, her sleeves drooping and her arms clasped—perhaps imprisoned—behind her. The composition

seems to emphasize the idea of abundance, in its cornucopias, and power, in its crown, just out of reach. This may be meant only as a metaphor for the incomplete gratification upon which all pornographic narratives depend for their impetus[80]; however, it also seems to play with constructs of confinement, suggesting that, for Venus, her reign over the Venusberg might be less an idyll than a sentence. There is no vanishing point in this composition, no break in the undulating foliage save the white of the floor and Venus herself, pale in a pale shift. If there is space left to be filled in this illustration, redemption to be sought, the illustration suggests, that space is within the goddess herself—she is generosity incarnate. She participates willingly in the sexual escapades of her world, but apart from the pleasuring of the unicorn, an act that seems to serve as a mechanism actuated—the call to breakfast—rather than a desire fulfilled, she never initiates them. Alone with Tannhäuser in the pavilion during a hiatus between orgies, she is remarkably retiring: the description of her body as "nervous and responsive," her thighs "closed," her buttocks "as a plump virgin's cheek," imply inexperience, or at least reticence, rather than libidinous gusto (54). She is even put to bed afterwards by Mrs. Marsuple like a child. Later, riding in the carriage that she and Tannhäuser overturn with the enthusiasm of their coupling, the hand she introduces into the chevalier's trousers is described as one of "comfort"; she eases the difficulties of an unexpected erection rather than initiates intercourse on her own account. Like the narrator of Beardsley's story, she behaves throughout the incomplete narrative as a guide, concealing her control under the veil of hospitality, drawing her guest forward on a tour of all the diversions her little world has to offer. This Venus is neither the temptress of Swinburne nor the spoiled goddess of Wagner; she is maternal, yet innocent, apparently submissive, a conflation of the figures

of Madonna and the goddess, the sacred and profane love that is a trope of the Tannhäuser tradition. In spite of the perversion, the paganism, the decadence (in both senses) of the society, in the figure of Venus, the terms are shown to be the same on both sides of the boundary that separates the Venusberg from the world. The quest for experience that Beardsley constructs brings the chevalier full circle, from the light of an interceding divinity through the dark gates…and back into the light of a sympathetic divinity.

Much of Tannhäuser's time spent inside the Venusberg is also spent inside the goddess; for him, a single sexual act occurs within a quiet, gentle, generous body that is contained within a loud, predatory, self-pleasuring world under the hill, which is itself contained within the undescribed world of Aesthetes, Christians, and the nineteenth-century morality that Tannhäuser abandoned. For Iser, the act of negotiating the dissonances in a story is the mechanism that changes a reader over its course; if that is true, then negotiating the conflicts between, and within, the worlds with which he has intercourse every time he has intercourse must also transform Tannhäuser. He does change; even in the few completed chapters Beardsley left, Tannhäuser becomes more active and more questioning. The effeminate practitioner of poses at the gates of the Venusberg begins to give way to the dominating lover; after dinner, alone in the pavilion with Venus, Tannhäuser initiates intercourse with some violence, tearing her garments and bruising her flesh with his rings—the power in the scenario is his, although the permission is still hers. His power consolidates through the rest of story, even in the moment in de la Pine's studio when Tannhäuser dresses as a woman—a clear refiguring of the harem scene in *Don Juan*—he is spoken of not just as beautiful, but a "Goddess,"

as though in sharing Venus's body he has also been imbued with a degree of her divinity (79). The contemplator of artistic trifles ranging from Racine to romances in his bedroom becomes the ruminating, one might even say Romantic, thinker at the edge of the sleeping lake. The chevalier suffers a "strange mood," almost a hallucination: "It seemed to him that the thing would speak, reveal some curious secret, say some beautiful word, if he should dare wrinkle its pale face with a pebble…Then he wondered what might be on the other side; other gardens, other gods?" (73). This lake, a hole in the enclosed world of the Venusberg and thus a potential avenue out into the larger world(s), offers either extraordinary potential for revelation in the form of secrets, gods, and gardens (or extraordinary potential to experience more of what the Venusberg already is.) The chevalier need only abandon his preoccupation with surface perfection—with aesthetics—and transgress the boundary its surface represents to find out. Tannhäuser is not yet ready; he diminishes both the threat and the potential of the lake by comparing it to one depicted on a stage set, and then reflects that, though he would like to swim, he is afraid of drowning, or in other words, being consumed by the lake and transformed irrevocably. (Swinburne's Tannhäuser would have no such qualms.) But the desire is there, and that is the important thing. Unlike Byron's Don Juan, born (initially, at least) into a spirit of sexual insouciance and brought to *weltschmerz* by exposure to worldly troubles like physical threat and the horrors of war, Beardsley's Tannhäuser is able to touch the edges of world-pain only through carnality and exposure to the goddess. The lake scene appears to occur early, rather than late, in the plot, and even though the narrative is truncated the knight still ventures on to de la Pine's studio and the casino; Beardsley clearly intends the knight to have more experiences, so it is possible that the

trajectory of the tale and its transformative effects would push him past his reservations regarding transformation before bringing him back to this lake and its mysteries.

In *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser*, then, the elements of seduction, which are still present in the disarming representation of the title characters, the intimate tone and flattering allusiveness of the narrator's discourse, even the control evinced by the narrative as it reveals its gossip and protects its secrets, allow themselves to be superseded by the creation of a series of dissonances (in the worlds within the narrative, in the text and illustrations in which the narrative is wrapped) that both knight and reader must negotiate. The Chevalier, an innocent blind to his own limitations, seeks a redemption he thinks he has rejected in the guise of experience. He abandons a world of surfaces to immerse himself in a world of display. Willingly consumed by its excesses, he is himself remade. The society that breaks him is configured in imitation of one that is itself on the verge of breaking. The goddess that he seeks profane pleasure in becomes the haven in which redemption is sought. A text that is full of frenetic sexual energy and an excess of sensory detail is illustrated with static pen drawings of trapped figures in a world of texture about to smother them. Negotiating these inconsistencies—synthesizing a cohesive narrative in which consumption creates, in which display conceals, in which stillness is the highest form of activity, and redemption rejected is redemption found—brings the knight to the point of agency and escape, and the reader to the realization that *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser* reverses the usual dynamic of decadent writing, which Potolsky defines as "conversions to the aesthetic life, initiations into artistic mysteries, and students transformed into literal or figurative artworks under the influence of their mentors" (*Decadent Republic* 106). Under the influence of a whole kingdom, this

student is instead transformed by excess from an artwork, a conceit of surfaces, techniques, and poses, into something more—something real, with depth and breadth and substance and humanity, standing against the imaginary backdrop of the Venusberg. In the wake of Byron's Don Juan, Baudelaire's Valmont, and Swinburne's Tannhäuser, Beardsley's Chevalier promises to transgress the boundaries imposed by signifiers (be they terms of class, gender, religion, or even the labels "aesthete" and "libertine" themselves) in order to access the level of the real, the level at which seduction operates and true dynamics of power may be understood and taken advantage of for the benefit of the individual, the other, or the society as a whole.

CONCLUSION

REBORN, REFASHIONED, REBOOTED, REPEAT

It should be obvious, by this time, that nineteenth-century interest in the libertine tradition was anything but archival. Indeed, these four tales give every indication of extending the tradition of the whore's dialogue meta-fictionally, replacing the pedagogical relationship between experienced whore and novice with a similar association between text and reader. In the case of Byron, Baudelaire, Swinburne, and Beardsley, at least, a not-at-all-archival interest in seduction narratives signaled an intention to refashion new tools from old, in order to serve new masters, accomplish new aims, and promote new philosophies. Libertine literature has a number of seductive rhetorical advantages. As a peripheral appendage of pornography, its subject matter is an open secret, and so, by the very fact of picking up the book, the reader is already complicit in and primed to accept the expressed vices within. As part of a genre whose primary attraction is that it can stimulate real arousal through simulated acts, its nature presupposes, and encourages, an exceptionally high degree of reader identification with one or more key (usually masterful) characters. As a genre that is primarily about seduction, and the rhetorical machinations of individuals manipulating asexual situations into sexual ones through dialogue, it is prone to gaps, elisions, and dramatic irony, all of which provide space for the reader to negotiate and personalize aspects of the story's reality, to become, in effect, co-conspirators. A savvy writer—and these *enfants terribles*

of Romanticism and Decadence were nothing if not audience-aware—could control the duration, the nature, and the degree of that complicity through both the careful manipulation of gaps and the design of identification-worthy characters, in order to stage discoveries for and inculcate notions in the reader that fit the writer's own ideas regarding religion, morality, and the value of sexuality to human experience.

Such a claim may provide a useful frame for examining certain works of nineteenth-century fiction that are not refashioned libertine texts. Stories containing unexplained vices—Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* spring immediately to mind—often become unexpectedly coy regarding the sins their villains perpetrate, a coyness that may hint at the original sin that created the villain. After the death of Sybil Vane, Dorian is absent from society without explanation, to his peers or the reader, on many occasions. His scandalous activities, referred to by Basil indistinctly as "horrible charges" (170), perpetrated between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-eight, are the stuff of rumor and speculation. Of course, such gaps give the reader ample room to personalize the tale with those sins that are both most alarming and most delicious; they also suggest that Dorian might not understand them himself. In spite of the claim he makes to Basil, that "[e]ach of us has Heaven and Hell in him," Dorian spends so little time in self-reflection it is doubtful he really understands the terms (175). From the beginning of the story Dorian Gray proves a beautiful, if unexpectedly obtuse, subject, a bit like the adolescent Don Juan as conceived by Byron. Upon seeing himself in Basil's portrait, the reader is told, "[a] look of joy came into his eyes, as if he had recognized himself for the first time…The sense of his own beauty came upon him like a revelation" (27). If it is merely

his reflection that is such a novelty, the reader is left wondering how the boy shaves or ties his tie; if, however, this is his first experience seeing the other side of himself, the one that encompasses the passionate, sexual, even vicious possibilities of human nature, the reaction makes more sense. Had the portrait been hung in the drawing room rather than hidden away in the nursery, had Dorian launched into a series of Juanesque encounters recounted in the pages of the book as well as at the dinner table, had the effects of those encounters been allowed to mark the beauty of the boy as well as the paint, then *The Picture of Dorian Gray* might have turned out to be an aesthetic comedy rather than an aesthetic tragedy. But this does not happen; the essence of the tragedy is that the boy's secrets are secret, even from himself. Dorian speaks of his childhood in terms romantic rather than realistic (the same way Swinburne's Tannhäuser initially remembers his service as knight) calling his nursery an emblem of "the stainless purity of his boyish life" (135). The elaborate course of aesthetic experimentation he undertakes in hopes of finding a new way to live, a course about which the reader is told in exhaustive detail, has nothing to do with the self—he researches exotic perfumes, South American music, and literary jewels—and, unsurprisingly, no new personal philosophy results. Only his portrait, shut away in the upstairs nursery, marks any change, any development in the man, and the mildew, dust, and mice suggest that Dorian does not get up to the nursery to make note of those changes very often. He sails the course of his life without looking. Dorian is disintegrated; he has two selves, one acknowledged, one not. The artist discovers that second self, distilling it into the portrait, but even then the man does not recognize himself in, or understand, the representation—he sees only his secrets, not himself. His sin, then, has less to do with interesting inexpressible vices than his ability to

acknowledge or comprehend them; he thinks he understands himself because his image hangs on the wall, but he does not. He cannot. He lacks the fundamental intellectual equipment. More to the point, he thinks the other half of nature can be hidden away, but as the story proves, it cannot.

Likewise, in Stevenson, the good Doctor Jekyll has disintegrated—one body has split itself into two. The actions of that second, "evil" Hyde persona are, in the text, largely unexpressed. (There is even room for doubt about those crimes which are mentioned—the reader is given only third-hand accounts of Hyde running down a child and clubbing a Member of Parliament.) In his confession, Jekyll admits to, but still defends, a youthful "duplicity": "I concealed my pleasures…It was thus rather the exacting nature of my aspirations than any particular degradation in my faults, that made me what I am and, with even a deeper trench than in the majority of men, severed in me those provinces of good and ill which divide and compound man's dual nature" (115-6). It is science, rather than art, which distills these unspoken secrets into the putative deformity of Hyde, and for a time, Jekyll revels in both the anonymity of his sins and the amnesia—in the fact that he has secrets he does not even tell himself. But, as with Dorian Gray, man cannot thrive in disintegrated form, and eventually the Hyde identity overtakes the Jekyll identity and dies. As with Dorian Gray, the diffidence of the man about facing his own sins is echoed in the bashfulness of the text about recounting them; the text expects the reader to do the work of their creation and comprehension. In this way, the text sets the reader a test, a natural opportunity to demonstrate that they are more intelligent, more aware, less flawed, less blind than the protagonists with whom the reader is supposed to sympathize. Flattering? Absolutely. Troubling? Yes, because such a

mechanism suggests that these texts, overtly less provocative than an obvious adaptation of a libertine work like Don Juan, are nonetheless trolling for the kind of readership for whom open secrets are not secrets at all. (One wonders if Jane Austen's demureness on the subject of Wickham's true character—a subject Elizabeth, and thus the reader, can only partly divine—was meant to imply something much more sordid than a picker-up of money, where available, and unguarded feckless girls.) Postmodernity likes to think of the nineteenth century as a departure from its Augustan forebears, a layered cultural construct consisting of a consciousness of gentle domesticity glossing over a political subconscious of prostitutes, syphilis, green carnations, and flagellation parlors. Perhaps, outside the schoolroom, at least, the domestic consciousness was less blind than we think, and readers, even of mainstream, unprovocative fiction, were accustomed not just to fill the gaps in the text with a negotiated reality, as Iser suggest, but to make note of them as signifiers of a flaw in the viewpoint character as well as the focal one.

Or perhaps we read more literally than we like to think. When filling in the biographical gaps for those authors who were not untiring diarists (in the manner of Casanova or Pepys), it is common to turn to their fiction for clues, under the assumption that writers write what they know. To judge from their collected works, Byron, Baudelaire, Swinburne, and Beardsley all seem to know quite a lot about sexual matters, vice, and deviancy. As Aesthetes and Decadents—or just the "mad, bad, and dangerous to know" brand of Romantic—their reputations are built upon it. But the power relied upon by libertine literature and pornography to simulate the effects of sexual experience in the absence of sex suggests that their knowledge need not have been derived from personal experience; they could, as it were, have merely read a compelling book about it.

Even when they speak of their sins, their accounts may be unreliable. Some critics are careful to distinguish between intellectual interest and sexual practice: Richard Dellamora, for instance, classifies Swinburne as a "not-homosexual" in modern terms, on the grounds that "male-male sexuality was a central imaginative fact" (218), rather than what we might now term a lifestyle choice. The distinction neatly avoids involving Swinburne, a highly individual thinker with idiosyncratic interests, in modern and potentially anachronistic debates on matters of essentialism in gender and sexual practice. Even Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes, in her prefatory axioms to *Epistemology of the Closet*, that the extraordinary variation in individual sexual realities complicates, though does not undermine, the modern impulse to identify and delineate sexual identities.[81] Unfortunately, not all critics are so careful. John Selwyn Gilbert's 1982 documentary for the BBC, "Aubrey Beardsley and His Work," for example, remarks upon Beardsley's stated intention, in a letter, to show up to a popular restaurant "dressed up as a tart," coupled with his obvious interest in women dressing as a subject of illustration, as evidence of a transvestitist tendency. The narrator questions whether the letter is serious—the recipient was John Lane, with whom Beardsley was often facetious—but in spite of the tone and the potential for a metaphoric, rather than literal, reading of the claim, Brian Reade, as commentator, asserts that Beardsley's interest in, and practice of, transvestitism is an "inescapable" conclusion. He points to the itemization of women's clothing in *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser* as proof. (There is no indication, incidentally, in Beardsley's letters that he went to dinner at all on that occasion, nor is there any other reference to cross-dressing.) Given the circumstances of Beardsley's life—his illness; his reputation, built half on talent and half on shock value; his delight in

his own impish verbal perversity—the conclusion seems anything but inescapable. Indeed, since Beardsley, like Swinburne, Baudelaire, and Byron before him, writes specifically about characters involved in projects of seductive experience that, thanks sometimes to happy accident and sometimes to careful curation, are meant to test, trouble, and break down definitions of identity, any claims to essential anything—be it gender, class, sexuality, or religious belief—based on his work seem rash.[82] These stories seem to be cautionary tales, warning us against a rush to identify and demarcate, against the inclination to push the boat out too far in supposing either essentialism or pose. Baudelaire writes a Valmont who is an irreligious sexual manipulator, yet is capable of extraordinary self-sacrifice—is he villain or hero; Byron gives us a Don Juan who dresses as a woman, lives in a harem, and sleeps with women—are we to label him a transvestite, a lesbian, or just a guy with extraordinary luck? If, as Wilde contends in *De Profundis*, "the supreme vice is shallowness," such labels, when allocated categorically and without reservation, may be more perverse than the experiences they attempt to label.

The final implication of this study is by way of being a minor endorsement of interdisciplinary media criticism. We have seen how, in all four cases, these writers have unearthed old stories and renewed them for rhetorical purpose, in effect making old stories about seduction themselves seductive in new times and to new audiences. In most cases, this necessitated a change in genre—Don Juan jumped from play to pantomime to poem, Valmont from novel to criticism, Tannhäuser from song to opera to poem to illustrated novel. In each case, narratives were significantly reconfigured—redesigned rather than adapted. In modern parlance, their stories were "rebooted." In the twenty-first century, in order to fill the endless demand for visual and digital media, the fashion has

progressed from mere literary adaptation to full-scale literary reinvention across genres, so much so that the distinctions between disciplines that study those genres—literature studies, genre studies, film studies, television studies—appear to be at best arbitrary and at worst detrimental to more complete understanding of the development of the narrative over time. It is no longer the case that, if a book sells, they make a movie of it and no more is heard. Books spawn movies that spawn television spin-offs and tie-in novels that spawn comic books and fan-fiction that become extended universes for new movies and television shows. Books spawn movies that spawn theme parks. Theme parks spawn movies that spawn books.[83]

Story now spends so much time in dialogue with itself we have an elaborate lexicon of common-use terms to delineate the kind of challenge presented: the "crossover", a mixing of two or more story worlds; "retroactive continuity" or "retcon," the alteration of the facts of a preexisting storyline in order to make new contradictory characters or events possible, to correct factual errors, or to smooth over preexisting discontinuity; and the "reboot," the reimagining of all but the essential elements of a preexisting story, as a way of freeing it entirely from the demands of continuity without completely severing the connection with the parent narrative. As we have seen over the course of this argument, story renovations (as opposed to new literary constructions) allow long-running stories to enjoy the simultaneous benefits of familiarity and novelty; they can cross generations, attracting new audiences or readers with at least a degree of contemporary relevance, while retaining former audiences through nostalgia.[84] They can be forward-looking and reactionary at the same time. All three methods of reinvention (but especially retconning and rebooting) work because narratives can be thought of as

bodies, composed of bone, flesh, and space. Bone is those components of the story that are brought forward, either because they are necessary for the recognition of the old story as part of the genealogy of the new (to excite that nostalgic response) or because they contain some critical dynamic that is part of the continuing message of the evolved storyline. Flesh is composed of those aspects of the preceding stories that are deemed irrelevant or outmoded and which may be safely stripped away. The space—Iser's gaps—is made up of those inconsistencies or omissions in the parent narrative that give the reinventor the room to speculate, that first toehold from which to begin to conceive the narrative successor. The relevant critical questions regarding such reboots and retcons are the same questions I have been asking about the more canonical literary reinventions discussed in this argument: what is it about the bones of a story that makes them relevant to both the parent and progeny narratives, and what rhetorical function is served by the changes made and the material added to the parent narrative? The fact that such reinventions may have jumped the barrier between genres, or even between media, should be irrelevant; the relevant issue is that the variations on a story—Don Juan, Tannhäuser, Star Trek—come together to create a canon of their own, each element of which is in dialogue with both on the canon as a whole and its own context, the sum of the whole providing practically endless—if hairsplitting on matters of generic or media legitimacy can be avoided—material for examination. Because the way Byron, Baudelaire, Swinburne, and Beardsley read, reacted, and rewrote is the way we write now.

NOTES

[1] Oscar Mandel puts the date of composition of *El Burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra* between 1612 and 1616, even though it did not turn up in print until 1630. See also Wade.

[2] Postmodernity has too. In a December 18, 1988 *New York Times* theater review entitled "Don Juan in His Own Language," theater critic Richard Shepard reckoned that more than 40 authors had taken a stab at the "profligate and profaner" since his invention. The occasion for such notice in the popular press? A 27th Street Spanish-language revival of the 1844 Zorilla drama *Don Juan Tenorio*. Laclos' antihero Valmont transitions from the page to the big screen in at least two English-language films (the 1988 *Dangerous Liaisons*, played by John Malkovich, and the 1989 *Valmont*, played by Colin Firth) and one Korean, the 2003 *Seukaendeul.* Casanova is an old standby, revived eponymously at least 16 times on the big and small screen, beginning with the 1918 Hungarian silent film and ending—so far—in 2005 when he was the subject of two very different treatments in the motion picture starring Heath Ledger and the BBC miniseries where David Tennant and Peter O'Toole share the title role. Some ideas, it seems, will not die.

[3] For a detailed explanation of the convergence between the libertine text and the libelous tract, see Section III, "Do Books Cause Revolutions?" in Darnton.

[4] The editor's preface to *Dangerous Liaisons* appears to expect a female audience, specifically imagining a mother passing the text along to her daughter on her wedding day. (Janie Vanpée notes the potential for irony here, that the text may be intended as either a what-to-avoid or a how-to.) Yet correspondence between Laclos and the novelist Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni suggests that an actual female audience is a good deal less comfortable with the characterization of women in the novel and its didactic capability. For further discussion of the correspondence and Laclos' handling of the objections, see both Vanpée and Antoinette Sol.

[5] Sigmund Freud's ambivalence toward his subject colored the perceptions of a century of critics when, in 1914, he termed seduction, the central precept of his now-abandoned seduction theory, "passive sexual experiences in the first years of childhood"—in effect, rape plus pedophilia, no discourse required (17). Later critics studying seduction narratives opened up the definition only slightly. Donna Bontatibus, for instance, studying early American examples, defines seduction as "a euphemism for the most abusive means of maintaining women's allegiance to the new nation," or rape in the service of political determinism (she even terms the infant nation a "rape culture") (5). For Elizabeth Barnes, these same seduction narratives leverage the confusion between seductive manipulation and patriarchal caretaking, thus both a subversion of the interpretive faculties and an overt projection of physical power and familial authority.

[6] In de Sade's works, servants are seen, not heard—called upon to perform a great many sexual acrobatics, but they do not say much. Their acts are narrated or explicated instead by their social superiors, as in *Philosophy in the Bedroom*'s seventh dialogue.

[7] Ros Ballaster proposes a similar idea, much more succinctly, in the course of her study of very early eighteenth-century seduction narratives by women's writers and the gender-based struggle for epistemological control: "The telling of a story of seduction is also a mode of seduction" (24).

[8] Like Barthes, Roy Roussel, Thomas Di Piero, and Katherine Binhammer also emphasize discourse as seduction's primary tool in their analyses of eighteenth-century narratives, but locate interpretation (and misinterpretation) as the primary event. Roussel classifies seduction according to outcome: in one type, the man undertakes a project in which he "mimics a feminine susceptibility to feeling…only to lure her [the

lover] to do the same. Then he tells his friends"; in the other, the susceptibility that is initially feigned becomes real, and the man begins to seek "a truly personal desire" and ultimately surrenders himself (21). Di Piero widens the scope of the seducer's mimicry; seducers use "unstable and duplicitous language and behavior" to feign stability and social legitimacy and manipulate expectation (237). Binhammer, uncharacteristically positive in her view of the subject, glosses over any duplicitous intent in the seducer in favor of interest in the reception of the seducer's language and behavior by the victim; seduction presents a problem of interpretation to which the seduction narrative, which acts as a kind of field guide to what she calls "the semiotics of love," is a solution (6).

[9] For an examination of *Seduction* as an antifeminist polemic that ironically violates Baudrillard's own pretensions to seductive discourse—which the author terms "hype"—see Andres Ross.

[10] It may be useful to recall that Letter 34 is addressed to the Marquise de Merteuil, and thus is an exhibit from the primary seduction (which Baudrillard considers the only seduction) that occurs in the novel—Valmont's failed coercion of Merteuil, the scheme that is meant to be furthered by the successful seductions of Tourvel and Cécile. As such, the contention, in writing, that seduction is best conducted in speech may be an ironic statement designed to disarm the prey and conceal the intent of the letter (989). Alternatively, it may be that Valmont's seduction of Merteuil fails because, exiled to the country, he is unable to maintain the enclosed world that seduction seems to require; only Cécile remains within his reach throughout the novel.

[11] Such ignorance may be more than just a rhetorical pretense; strategic obtuseness may be necessary to milking the libertine experience of its pleasure. In "Casanova, Inscriptions of Forgetting," Chantal Thomas contends that it "guarantees two elements of the pleasure principle: not seeking to know whenever knowledge might lead to a reduction in pleasure, and rejecting out of hand, at every point, any insinuation of guilt" (37).

[12] The reader is, after all, the insider, part of the "we" rather than the "they." Case in point—half a dozen pages before this moment of flattering address, Casanova brings up his penchant for deception: "You will laugh when you discover I often had no scruples about deceiving nitwits and scoundrels and fools… I always congratulate myself when I remember catching them in my snares, for they are insolent and presumptuous to the point of challenging intelligence. We avenge intelligence when we deceive a fool… for a fool is encased in armor and we do not know where to attack him" (16). If the reader is laughing at the deception, then the reader cannot possibly be the nitwit it targets, so the structural similarity in the twin images of the fool in armor and the salamander toughened by flame *must* be accidental.

[13] The BBC mini-series *Casanova* actualizes this framing by splitting Casanova into two characters and two separate processes of seduction, a split identity that disarms by the appearance of adolescence and impotence simultaneously—the old Casanova recalls the adventures of his younger self for the benefit of a kitchen maid, leaning heavily on the appearance of infirmity to get and keep her attentions, while the young Casanova's seductions are, by contrast, initiated recklessly, fecklessly, and with a hyperactive abandon; too little capability as a foil for too little thought, each concealing the effectiveness of its component seduction. To be clear, in the mini-series the aged Casanova does not debauch the kitchen maid—he dies too soon, and it is never clear if sex is his aim—but as a result of his seduction he does receive from her care, attention, and respect not otherwise accorded to him by other servants of the Castle Dux.

[14] Gulemot's definition of pornography is coy, but clear, and relies solely on reader response: "A piece of writing is pornographic if it triggers in the reader certain physiological reactions, which I trust I shall not have to elaborate upon" (134). The argument then moves almost immediately into considerations of pornography's philosophical addenda. Hunt's list of such characteristics is also weighted in favor of the philosophical, but seems to adequately reflect the common theoretical foci of scholars of pornography: "free-thinking and heresy, to science and natural philosophy, and to attacks on absolutist political authority… [as well as] gender differentiations…"(11). For accounts of the application of pornography to sugar-coat various ideological pills, see Peter Cryle and Lisa O'Connell, Richard Darnton, Paula Findlen, Stephen Marcus, Rachel Weil, and practically any other scholar who has put pen to paper on the subject of

the history of pornography. Perhaps in its pure, philosophically uninflected state, pornography is too self-evident to merit analysis.

[15] Even Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, in spite of being an almost continuous series of sex acts which include repeated orgies, has to create a highly artificial postorgy storytelling scene, a narrative interruption that introduces extremely brief subplots, in order to get out of Fanny's head.

[16] J. Rives Childs contests it briefly; Norwich considers and discounts it in the preface to the William R. Trask translation of *History of my Life*; Kelly and Lydia Flem fail to consider it at all, preferring instead to emphasize Casanova as the illegitimate issue of an actress of unknown antecedents.

[17] Unless the reader is a twentieth-century critic, who instead populates Casanova's prepubescent backstory with psycho-sexual concerns. Chantal Thomas follows Fliess in a reading that attributes the incessant bleeding to "une activité masturbatoire incessante" (*Casanova* 354); Kelly posits that "he almost certainly caused the nosebleed, himself, exploring and over-exploring his physical self" (27); Flem considers the hemorrhage the first futile attempt to reclaim the attentions of a mother in the midst of a narcissistic retreat (43), and possibly the source of his affinity with women (195).

[18] Emery may insist on assuming Casanova's intended audience was male; given his flirtatious nature and extensive correspondence with women throughout his life, it seems unlikely that Casanova would have been so narrow in his preconceptions.

[19] Emery notes the similarities in these two episodes, but underplays the contribution of both the power dynamic here and the passage of time to Casanova's self-distancing. It is useful to note that Casanova was 19 when he met Bellino and 40 when he met Lunin; it is possible that time gave Casanova a degree of resistance to the attractions of a pretty face, whatever the gender. It is also possible that, having spent a dozen volumes seducing the reader into complacency, Casanova need no longer hide bisexuality under the cover of an inexplicable and unavoidable attraction.

[20] Usually, but not always, it is the mother. Zaïre, for instance, Casanova's companion on the Russian leg of his travels, is bargained for by the father: "the father had replied that he would be willing [to give Zaïre into service], that he must get a hundred rubles because she still had her maidenhead" (986). Casanova is urged to check the veracity of this claim, though he contends, generously enough, that he would have completed the transaction regardless. For more on the ramifications of Casanova's preference for young girls in the larger context of Venetian law, see Larry Wolff.

[21] Jay Caplan contends that the painter is Boucher; Trask's notes credit either Gustaf Lundberg, a Swede, or Johann Anton Peters, a Boucher copyist.

[22]Haslett verifies the genealogy in detail in the first third of *Byron's* Don Juan *and the Don Juan Legend*. (Her argument, however, relies on emphasizing the similarities between the adolescent Don Juan and his roguish forebears.) For a detailed examination of the connections between *Don Juan* and the conventions, staging, and tropes of Regency pantomime, see Graham.

[23] Byron undergoes his own dramatic and formative exile; after leaving his wife, escaping to Italy, and taking up *Don Juan* as a project, Byron ends multiple affairs, suffers the death of his daughter Allegra and his friend and fellow poet Shelley, takes up revolution, and dies of a cold. See Marchand, volumes II and III.

[24] A geographical distinction demonstrated in the oft-quoted couplet "what men call gallantry, and gods adultery/Is much more common where the climate's sultry" (I, lxiii) and the less-familiar quatrain "Happy all the nations of the moral North!/ Where all is virtue, and the winter season/Sends sin, without a rag on, shivering forth/('T was snow that brought St. Anthony to reason)…"(I, lxiv). One wonders if the awkwardness of the latter verse is intended as a further commentary on the North's frigidity.

[25]Andrew Franta argues cogently that all the Romantic poets, including Byron, were concerned about reader response and its implications for poetic authority, particularly in the matter of unintended effects, so claims about authorial intention and reader manipulation are not out of place. For an examination of Byron's often contentious relationship with his reading (and reviewing) public, see Franklin.

[26] Byron was, however, a fan of the picaresque, and counted a deluxe edition of *Don Quixote* among his library possessions. See Boyd's chapter "Byron's Library and His Readings" for a more complete list of his collection.

[27] This is a marked departure from the libertine tradition and would come as a surprise to the protagonists of *Venus in the Cloister*, *Roxana*, or *Fanny Hill*, for whom femininity is no bar to a successful libertine project.

[28] Byron communicates the violence of war through description as well as metaphor; for an assessment of the descriptive power of his war scenes, see Rutherford, "*Don Juan*: War and Realism," in which he considers them "the most impressive of all [Byron's] attempts to reconcile poetry with truth and wisdom" (51).

[29] Byron's revolutionary ideals, manifested in his personal and pecuniary support of the Greek revolt against the Turks, are much mentioned in the criticism, but the ambivalence regarding the Turks that may underpin this scene is less well known. See Marchand, volume III for a detailed account of Byron's involvement in the Greek uprising. For a briefer account of the Greek/Turk conflict and more on Byron's feelings about Turkey, see Douglas Dakin or Andre Maurois.

[30] Byron is circumspect about his motives even in his private communications. Both facetious and inscrutable regarding the possibilities, in a letter dated February, 1821, he writes of his intentions for the plot thus:

> I mean to take him the tour of Europe, with a proper mix of siege, battle, and adventure, and to make him finish as Anarcharsis Cloots in the French Revolution… But I had not quite fixed whether to make him end in Hell, or in an unhappy marriage, not knowing which would be the severest. The Spanish tradition says Hell: but it is probably only an Allegory of the other State. (242-3)

[31] He reached it in the end. Just before his death, he undertook the financing of a military unit in the Greek resistance; the cold he caught on that battlefield killed him.

[32] The notes are seldom considered in their entirety in recent Baudelaire criticism. On the rare occasion modern critics examine Baudelaire's "Notes sur *Les Liaisons dangereuses*" at all, it is usually for the purpose of appropriating a line or two from the notes to frame an argument about Laclos, rather than Baudelaire—see Philip Thody and William Mead. Stevens is a notable exception.

[33] It is possible Baudelaire's labelling of Valmont as dandy may be as much an indicator of a self-recognition as the result of studied rational assessment; Ellen Moers suggests that "Baudelaire used the word *dandy* as a value term, a kind of personal, suggestive, imprecise shorthand. Artists and writers in whom he found fellow feelings, and in whom he therefore admired, he would call dandies for reasons difficult to decipher; the rest he could then dismiss as non-dandies" (275)—in essence, applying the syllogism "I am a dandy, I like you, therefore you must be a dandy too."

[34] Baudelaire catalogues the propensity to be duped extensively in *Les Fleurs du mal*. Examples includes, but are not limited to, "Le Vampire," "Les Métamorphoses du Vampire," "Femmes damnés: Delphine et Hippolyte," "Le Possédé," "L'Amour du mensonge," "Un Fantôme," "Le Poison," "Le Destruction," and "Le Masque. "

[35] Thody's reading of *Dangerous Liaisons* acknowledges the possibility of a similar conclusion: "[it is possible to] see both Valmont and Madame de Merteuil as destroyed not by chance and as a concession to official morality, but by the inherently moral consequences of their own acts and attitudes" (834).

[36] Baudelaire is not alone on this. For a Freudian reading of the Frears/Hampton 1988 film version of *Dangerous Liaisons* that considers Madame de Merteuil, lesbianism, and the "masculinity complex," see Alan Singerman.

[37] Milton may have excoriated pride, but Baudelaire does not. Pride's value as a positive character trait, rather than a deadly sin, part and parcel of the revolutionary spirit, is demonstrated in "Le Peintre de la vie moderne," where the claim is made that dandies "sont des représentants de ce qu'il y a de meilleur dans l'orgueil humain, de ce besoin, trop rare chez ceux d'aujourd'hui, de combattre et de détruire la trivialité" (1179). The other option, of course, is to deal with the trivial in a manner that is itself significant, a common libertine practice.

[38] This fragmented duality fragments further when one considers the labile nature of the language of evil. As Edward Kaplan points out in "Baudelairean Ethics," a study of what he calls "ethical irony," the word "mal" can signify evil, illness, or pain (93). So the "*mal se connaissant*," Valmont's label, can equally be read as a student of evil, the libertine perpetrating sin; a student of illness, like the medical men that populate Baudelaire's metaphors; or a student of pain, which, while it can suggest an intentional viciousness of the sort seen in the work of de Sade, can also bring to bear an element of empathy. The "*mal*" itself thus has the potential to be understood, healed, or pitied.

[39] Thody characterizes Baudelaire's reading of Tourvel as "extreme approval" and the source of "an essentially progressive and humanistic interpretation" of Laclos' novel (832).

[40] "Baudelaire, lecteur de Laclos" (29). I would question whether, given the references to ashes, paint, and dirt, all accretions of inert particles, Baudelaire was willing to credit them even with the sentience of animality.

[41] Valmont's destructiveness may have only added to the appeal; Pichois describes the source of Baudelaire's zeal as "anger [that] transcended politics," noting that the poet "was fighting neither for the Republic, nor for the revolution, but satisfying a deeper instinct for revolt" (160).

[42] Most versions lean heavily on the good adventurer and the evil fairy. The seducing fairy is a common trope in folklore, crossing into literature early in the *Odyssey*, in the account of Odysseus's sojourn with Calypso, and much later in such nineteenth-century classics as Anderson's "The Little Mermaid", Keats' *Lamia* and *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, and even Tennyson's *Lady of Shalott.* For the historical and cultural scope of the trope, see Barbara Fass (15-26). For a précis of the debate staged in Grimm and Krappe about the possible Celtic origins of Tannhäuser, see Simpson, who also dismantles the Wagnerian version into its component myths and inspirations.

[43] For a brief précis of the numerous mythological sources for the story, see Simpson. For a collection of the various versions of the folksong, as well as an in-depth discussion tracing the twin motifs of the Tannhäuser seduction and the Venusberg through fifteenth-, sixteenth-, and seventeenth-century German mythology, as well as the Tannhäuser tale's intersection with Grail myth, *Parsifal*, and the *Schwanritter*, see Barto.

[44] Why this would be the case is not clear, as the poem does not appear to make any changes to the condition of immortality that is normally associated with Tannhäuser's sojourn in the Venus-Hill; it may be that Venus' demotion from goddess to middle-class housewife makes her equally susceptible to the human emotion of *ennui*.

[45] A scene expanded specifically for the disastrous Paris premiere; see Simpson (256).

[46] In any sense of the word; in a later letter to William Rossetti, dated 25 November, 1862, Swinburne takes exceptional delight that the divine Marquis cannot spell. See *Letters*, vol. 1, page 63.

[47] Jeremy Mitchell contends that pain "is absolutely central to [Swinburne's] genius" in an argument that traces the influences of the divine Marquis and masochism upon all the works in *Poems and Ballads*.

[48] In an examination of Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon*, T. D. Olverson links this impulse to Swinburne's Hellenism, a philosophy predicated on spiritual eroticism which underpins the notion that "the pursuit of pleasure can be seen as virtuous and spiritually and philosophically enhancing" and thus a valid topic for public consideration (773).

[49] Some readers did exactly this, and complained—in 1901 Swinburne writes at least two apologies regarding that epigraph. To H.G. Fiedler he writes "I am quite sorry that you had so much trouble about Maistre Gaget. I must confess that he and his book…were pure inventions of my own at a rather early age, when I was fond of trying my hand at imitations of medieval French prose and Latin verse" (*Letters* VI 150). Charles Carrington's letter must have been more flattering, as Swinburne "confess[es] the youthful sin of forgery" while being "highly honoured and gratified by your estimate of my early improvisations in old French" (*Letters VI* 156). For Swinburne's forgotten female readership, see Heather Seagroatt.

[50] This is not to argue that all poetry must be syntactically accurate. However, the Tannhäuser tradition is quite normative in its deployment of antecedents, even when the version is not a translation. Consider the definitiveness of the following example from the Lytton-Fane "idyll," written first and only in English: "Large fame and lavish service had she then,/ Venus yclep'd, of all the Olympian crew/ Least continent of Spirits and most fair" (16). The inverted syntax and the forced archaism may not be every critic's cup of tea, but the subject of the sentence is nonetheless painfully clear.

[51] When she is named, eight stanzas in, it is only after the speaker's thoughts have turned to the incorporeal, comparing the beloved to the Virgin Mary. Even then, it is not clear if Venus is a name or just another metaphor.

[52] Allison Pease's discussion of Swinburne's critical reception suggests that this challenging of boundaries permeates the poet's work: "Within the debate over *Poems and Ballads* the margins constructed between civilization and nature, order and chaos, procreation and perversion, and male and female are all raised, deconstructed, and…reconstructed by Swinburne in his heated public response…" (43)

[53] Her concerns are so human she even submits herself to the processes of law; see Sarah Westphal on *Die Mörin*, the fifteenth-century tale in which Venus is the lead plaintiff in a class action against a seducer.

[54] See Malcolm Davies for the Biblical implications and connection to Heracles at the Crossroads.

[55] As fairy seductions go, though, this encounter is quite bland. It is not clear whether the goddess ever even notices Tannhäuser, much less encourages him; it is as though he is being led around by his own eyes. Fass finds that, in this poem, "imagination seems threatened by reduction to the merely erotic, almost justifying the medieval belief that imagination is a product of the senses and like them to be condemned as unhealthy and evil" (189). If this is the case, Tannhäuser has a great deal of imagination to be condemned for.

[56] See Morgan, "Reimagining Masculinity in Victorian Criticism."

[57] Robert Peters' reading of the sea's "panting mouth of dry desire" in stanza 10 as a "magnificent symbol of lust…which suggests and intensifies Tannhäuser's tortured erotic state" points out its simultaneously impossible, yet perpetual conditions—wet/dry; sated/insatiable—demonstrating that, even when not juxtaposed with the shore, the ocean has its own symbolic paradoxicality (79).

[58] Suicidal depression here may not be as likely a reading at it seems, as Swinburne himself did not seem to consider the prospect of an eternity with Venus as a hardship; in an 1864 letter to Lord Houghton, he

rejects the possibility of ennui, remarking salaciously on the knight's hypothetical response to the Titian Venus: "…four lazy fingers buried *dans les fleurs de son jardin*—how any creature can be decently virtuous within thirty square miles of it passes my comprehension. I think with her Tannhäuser need not have been bored—even till the end of the world" (*Letters* I 99). Swinburne's reaction also points up the power of an abstraction to excite desire, validating the knight's fervid devotion to an essentially passive object. Harrison and Julian Baird tend to privilege suffering over erotic potential in Tannhäuser's formation; see "Swinburne's Losses" and "Swinburne, Sade and Blake," respectively.

[59] Curiously, the expression "broken on the wheel" has itself become an idiom for weariness in German, Dutch, and Swedish.

[60] Waite also notes that the Venusberg was popularly believed to be a source for magical learning, a historical presupposition that underscores its pedagogical fitness as a locale for such an intense course of self-scrutiny.

[61] McGann notes in his discussion of "Ave Atque Vale" that, in pairing analogous terms, Swinburne is defining limits of a spectrum which he then subdivides into further limits, as if chasing the boundaries between them (*Swinburne* 171).

[62] Nor is it new to contemporary audiences; Baudelaire omits consideration of the redemption scene from his analysis of Wagner's opera, and the Paris audience booed all the way through the third act.

[63] For more on the difficulties the terseness of Beardsley's letters have created for his biographers, see Linda Zatlin's "Drawing Conclusions: Beardsley and Biography."

[64] In an April 8, 1896 letter to Smithers, Beardsley describes it as "the last century once more" (*Letters* 123), but by May 2 it has "been spoilt, begun again and carried up to the point where the will alone is wanting" (129). Apparently the will remained wanting. The submission of illustrations to *The Savoy* for "Under the Hill" also included *St. Rose of Lima* and *For the Third Tableau of 'Das Rheingold'*; it is not clear in the letters whether Beardsley considers the former part of the body of work for the Tannhäuser—the editors identify it with the "drawing No. 2" submitted to Smithers and mentioned in the letter of April 1, 1896 (121), but Beardsley has also spoken of *Toilet of Helen* as the second illustration to Smithers on November 7 of the previous year (103). The disposition of the *Rheingold* piece as other than part of "Under the Hill" is clarified on April 10, when Beardsley admits to mis-ascribing it (124). In spite of the title and contrary to Zatlin (*Sexual Politics* 197), Sutton (31), or Reade (350), *The Return of Tannhäuser to the Venusberg* was apparently not designed for *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser*, but instead to simultaneously pay a debt and round out Smithers' collection of Beardsley's work, *A Book of Fifty Drawings* (see October 4 letter, 177).

[65] An abbé or chevalier, depending on Beardsley's iteration. It is interesting to recall that Casanova styled himself the Chevalier de Seingalt while in the French court, though he held claim to no French titles; Tannhäuser, too, may be guilty of similar self-aggrandizement.

[66] Addison Bross emphasizes the synesthetic effect on the reader: the puffery and texture impart "a highly empathetic, sensual delight in the body's being softly rubbed and supported by mounds of cloth…able to give one a sense of womb-like pleasure and security" (15). So not only is Tannhäuser infantilized by being swaddled in such sumptuous clothes, but so, by extension, is the reader. The act of viewing the illustration creates a condition whereby the Chevalier and the audience share the same feeling of immaturity—an immaturity to be rectified, one assumes, by further experience of the text.

[67] Matthew Sturgis credits this transformation to "long study of Watteau, Lancret, St. Aubyn, Cochin, Dorat and the rococo masters of French illustration" and the French drawings Beardsley collected (261).

[68]The narrator remarks facetiously at one point that, though it is common to "paint heroes who can give a lady proof of their valiance at least twenty times a night…Tannhäuser had no such Gargantuan felicity…"

suggesting that the knight is not, in fact, entirely up to the task of satisfying Venus—other residents of the Venusberg break in afterwards and claim Venus for an orgy (55). But then, Byron's hero was not up to satisfying Gulbeyaz's rapacity either.

[69] A more complete explanation can be found in Marcus (272-3), but the gist of the requirement is two-fold: in pornography, nature is envisioned as an "immense, supine female form," and there is no "out there." For Marcus, this speaks of pornography's basis in infantile perspectives. It also happens to be the lover's perspective, a relocation of the deeply intimate gaze Swinburne's Tannhäuser confines to his beloved's head and neck, as well as the perspective of a personified phallus; as Potolsky notes, the faux dedication of the book to Cardinal Pezzoli is a pun on "pizzle" ("Decadent Counterpublic" 20), making *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser* in effect the penis' book. If, however, some larger analogy between Tannhäuser's journey through the Venusberg and sexual intercourse is intended, the story is too unfinished to see the metaphor through.

[70] Sometimes they are merely imaginary, as in the lambs' tails in moonlight, ice cream with gold beams, or the bream in a beef-based sauce (24-5). Depending on whose account you prefer, royalist or Roundhead, Lucy Waters was either wife or mistress to Charles II. In either incarnation, she had a reputation for lascivious behavior, so a tart filled with the fruit of Adam's fall, in the manner of a courtesan/fallen queen, is bound to be a sinful dish, or an interesting sexual encounter, if "tart" is given its slang meaning of "prostitute."

[71] Linda Dowling contends that this is merely covert mockery of the sexual peccadillos of other Aesthetes, but does not account for the tidy organization of deviancy by type ("Satire of Decadence" 35); as Beardsley had a copy of the 1895 edition of *Psychopathia Sexualis* on his bookshelf, it may be reasonable to suppose he was pursuing a larger critique of deviancy and its mystification in medical texts; see note 25 in Zatlin ("Aubrey Beardsley's 'Japanese' Grotesques" 106).

[72] This disinclination to name names is typical of the *chronique scandaleuse*, and can be seen in Manley's *New Atalantis* and Oldham's "Sardanapalus," among others, where it functions to both protect the writer from charges of libel or worse in a politically-motivated attack and titillate the reader with the possibility of knowing the participants in the scandal,.. "Sardanapalus" and the "language of blame" found in politically-motivated English pornography is discussed in Weil; the impact of the *chronique scandaleuse* and pamphleteering's role in bringing down the French monarchy is discussed in Darnton. Titillation is not the sole advantage to this pretense of intimacy; as we saw in Chapter 2, it also fosters the connection between seducer and victim that makes submission to the seducer appear desirable. Here, that pretense of inclusion turns the reader who reads on into a *de facto* conspirator in the adventures of Tannhäuser and his works in the Venusberg.

[73] These names do not appear to have any particular literary or historical significance, although many in the Venusberg do, being named for lovers—Sarrasine, the sculptor from *La Comedie Humaine*; Millamant from *The Way of the World*; Florizel from *A Winter's Tale*; Vadius, the scholar who benefits from *l'amour du grec* in *Les Femmes Savantes*; La Popelinière, mistress to the Duc de Richelieu; Amadour, husband to St. Veronica and himself a saint—a selection both decadent and cosmopolitan in that it spans multiple eras, none of them quite contemporary, and several nations. There is no indication that these characters know themselves to be allusively named. Except for Sarrasine, all the lovers are presented uncoupled from their beloveds, consistent with the idea of exile and also implying a certain cynical twist on literary happy endings.

[74] The style is Rococo, with particular emphasis placed on the looping garlands, like ropes, on every garment. There are an extraordinary variety of coiffeur decorations, worn in the mid-eighteenth-century manner. The dwarves wear pantaloons and wigs held perilously close to open flame. For the most part, female attendants are attired in gowns with tight, sometimes low-cut bodices and vast skirts, and have the rounded faces and small chins of a Fragonard or a Boucher subject. The males sport cavalier curls with lace cravats or naked torsos.

[75] See *Le grand dictionnaire des précieuses: ou La clef de la langue des ruelles* and *Les précieuses ridicules*, respectively, collected in Livet's two-volume *Le dictionnaire des précieuses.* Sutton poses a contrary argument that the language in Beardsley is meant to mock; though "ostensibly so unrelated to Wagner's works" it is intended as "parody of Wagner's operas"—in particular his formality and nationalistic fervor (144).

[76] For more on *les précieuses* as a proto-feminist construct, see Myriam Maître or Roger Duchêne. The connection between the Venusberg and these *salons* is further underscored by the borrowing of the name Rambouillet for Venus' cook in Chapter 3.

[77] Haldane Macfall, for instance, criticizes the language of the prose as "pedantic," "uneducated," and "dead," a "crude vulgarity" (80), while Trail damns the text with ironic praise, labeling the story a "perfectly wrought tour de force" whose expurgated version nonetheless "achieves a higher art" because of what it leaves out, suggesting that, contrary to its denotation, perfection is a journey rather than a destination (22).

[78] It is impossible not to comment on the demure restraint of this scene; outside of one man partially naked in the corner and Venus' bare breasts, all the usual perversely sexual tropes of Beardsley's work—embryos, phalluses, femmes fatale—are missing. The illustrations completed for this text are so tame that they never seem to be chosen for the covers of collections or criticism; at least one modern publisher pulls an illustration from *Salome* for the cover of *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser*, even though *Salome* is not included in the volume. Possibly it is more "Beardley-esque."

[79] For more on eighteenth-century dress as a possible signifier of female sexual deviancy in Beardsley's theatrical illustrations, see Bridget Elliott.

[80] Zatlin, for instance, sees this illustration as a necessarily restrained allusion to eighteenth-century pornography's taste for depictions of priapic worship as part of a larger consideration of the influence of French pornography on Beardsley's illustration; see the version of "Beardsley Redresses Venus" as published in *Victorian Poetry*.

[81] This is not to say she does not advocate such inquiry; in fact, she goes on to bemoan the tendency among academics to dismiss the relevance of modern sexual identities to historical contexts (52-3).

[82] Not that these are the only authors—nor the only sexual philosophy—to undertake such hands-on projects of development. For a detailed account of the complicated relationship between Oxford Hellenism, homosexual practice, masculinity, and effeminacy, see Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford*.

[83] For an example of the first point, consider the *Star Wars* universe. George Lucas uses the *Star Wars* original trilogy to exemplify, among other things, the mythic structures of the hero's journey proposed by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces; Star Wars* eventually comes to television as the animated *Clone Wars* series, while also generating a vast quantity of tie-in and expanded-universe fiction. Both iterations feed later big- and small-screen projects that continue to flesh out the narrative, creating their own tie-in and extended universe novels, etc. For an example of the latter point, look to the Harry Potter franchise, which gave rise to, among other things, a theme attraction called The World of Harry Potter, and the Pirates of the Caribbean theme park ride, which gave rise to a four-film franchise of the same name. I cannot help but think that Swinburne, Byron, et al., would have approved of such a blurring of the lines between narrative and experience.

[84] For a discussion of the possibilities of fanfiction, an independent and mostly online community-dependent genre of writing that is, by definition, "in a constant state of conversation and exchange," with varying degrees of fealty to context and canon, while generating a simply staggering amount of content, see Anne Jamison.

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